



BULLETIN

The North American Paul Tillich Society

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ERRATUM

• From Damian Wheeler, whose paper appeared in the Winter issue of the Bulletin:

"I wanted to point out one fairly significant error. On p. 29, it seems as though you unintentionally added an endnote from one of the other papers. Endnote #61 should be the reference to Spinoza and Corrington (the correct note is currently noted "61616161"). And the note that begins "Reading well beyond this proaedeutic" should be deleted."

• *Editor's Note:* Humble Apologies for the error in the text! Presbyopia is setting in.

Please send your papers on Tillich for publication in the Bulletin of the NAPTS to:
fparrella@scu.edu

You are helping to keep Tillich scholarship alive and adapt it to new generations of scholars.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Shearn, Samuel. *Returning to Tillich. Theology and Legacy in Transition*. Tillich Research 13. Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2018.

Price, Robert M., ed. *The Ground of Being: Neglected Essays of Paul Tillich*, with an Introduction by Thomas J. J. Altizer. Selma, NC: Mindvendor, 2015.

CALL FOR PAPERS NAPTS 2018

NOVEMBER 16-17, 2018, DENVER, COLORADO

Please send abstracts to Verna Ehret at vehret@mercyhurst.edu by April 30, 2018. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and submitted in an email attachment either in Microsoft Word or PDF format.

1. Veterans Visioning Panel

- This panel will be a roundtable discussion of not only the history of the Society, but also the role of Tillich scholarship in a wide range of contemporary issues. The moderator will provide the panelists with a set of pre-written questions developed in conversation with the panelists. We are looking for people who could speak to contemporary developments and challenges in theology, ethics, culture, social and political life, etc., and who also have a history of participation in the Society. The panel could include people with a breadth of knowledge of Tillich as well as people who have specialized in particular areas. The panelists will be invited to participate, but if you know of someone you think should be on this panel or would like to nominate yourself, please send those recommendations to Verna.

2. Book Panel *Paul Tillich and Asian Religions*

- Review panel on *Paul Tillich and Asian Religions*, a new edited volume from DeGruyter. This panel will be made up of invited panelists. We are currently working on the presenters, but if you have any recommendations, please send them to Verna.

Tillich Fellows Panel

- There is a separate CFP for this panel with an earlier submission date.

3. Thinking with Tillich about Contemporary Society

- The NAPTS seeks to promote contemporary scholarship on the work of Paul Tillich. In this year's meeting we are looking at the past, present, and future of Tillich studies. This open call for papers focuses on the ways current scholarship thinks through and with Tillich. We invite proposals that engage Tillich's work and intellectual tools in the study of nationalism, quasi-religion, trans-religious theology, or social and creative justice.

WHY TILlich? WHY NOW? A PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITY

TOM BANDY
AND MERCER PRESS

Merger Press has invited me to gather and edit a volume on Tillich's continuing influence on contemporary experience and culture. This is an invitation to participants in all Tillich Societies, and any student or professional interested in Tillich's impact on culture, to contribute articles.

The purpose of the book is to explore how Tillich's ideas and methodologies have been applied to issues and ideas, groups and movements, professions and sectors, and other cultural experiences and developments. We are particularly interested how Tillich's work is being used and adapted by leaders for other disciplines, and to enhance dialogue between religion and culture.

We hope that this volume can be released in time for the AAR/NAPTS annual meetings in 2019. Please send your proposals to me (tgbandy33@gmail.com) by the end of June 2018. Proposals should be 1 – 2 pages. These will be reviewed by Sharon Burch, Mary Ann Stenger, Fred Parrella, and myself. Once proposals are accepted, articles will need to be limited to 5000-6000 words (English only). The deadline for completed articles will be Dec. 31, 2018.

This invitation is being sent about the same time as the usual call for papers for the AAR/NAPTS annual meetings since it is possible that articles and papers might overlap. The idea for this book originally surfaced from informal conversations between Mercer Press editors and Sharon Burch, Mary Ann Stenger, Fred Parrella, and myself. Mercer Press has assured me that they will certainly grant permission for any article to be used in a future publication by the author as long as she or he cites the original use.

We are all quite excited about this project that focuses on Tillich's broader impact in culture, and hope that you will consider contributing to its success.

If you have questions, please feel free to communicate directly with me. And thank you for considering a contribution, or forwarding this invitation to a colleague that might be interested in publishing an article in this area.

Dr. Thomas G. Bandy
TGBandy33@gmail.com

TILlich's LOVECHILD

ROBERT CUMMINGS NEVILLE

Prefatory Comment by Lawrence A. Whitney, LC†

The executive board of the North American Paul Tillich Society invited Robert Cummings Neville to reflect on the influence of Tillich on his own theological project at the November 2017 meeting of the North American Paul Tillich Society in Boston prior to the Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.¹ (My personal thanks to Benjamin J. Chicka for having stepped in to moderate the conversation at the meeting when I was called away last minute). The paper below resulted from that invitation and was delivered to a packed hall with responses from Sharon Peebles Burch and Wesley J. Wildman, also below. As the paper and responses demonstrate, there remains a great deal at stake philosophically, theologically, and practically

for the Tillichian approach, and a wide range of opportunities for us who take inspiration from Tillich to develop, expand, and improve his insights. Of particular interest from the paper are the ways in which Neville develops Tillich to be more philosophically rigorous and robust, and drastically expands on the interreligious engagement Tillich embarked upon later in life. In the responses, Burch reflects on the intertwined theological and practical impact of Tillichian (and Nevillean) imminence by contrast with absolutized (Barthian) transcendence, and Wildman provides an honest and humane assessment of Tillich's relational entanglements in life, and from heaven, with Neville.

Introduction

Nancy Frankenberry once wrote, in a referee's letter for a volume of my *Philosophical Theology* trilogy, that I am a "lovechild of Paul Tillich and Alfred North Whitehead." Whereas I am not sure about the biology of this, I am deeply flattered by her intellectual genetics. Today I want to talk about the first half of that parentage, discussing four main topics: God as Ultimate and the Ground of Being, broken symbols, ultimate concern and the human predicament, and the public and systematic form for philosophical theology.

First, however, I want to say some personal things about Tillich and his influence on me. As an undergraduate and graduate student, I was an assistant for Professor John E. Smith at Yale, mainly his typist, sometimes his baby sitter, and also his bar tender at big parties when I reached the legal age of twenty-one.² Smith himself had been a student and assistant for Tillich at Union Seminary. So when Tillich came to Yale to preach in the university chapel, Smith gave after-church luncheon parties for him at which I tended bar. Tillich was an astonishing preacher. People jammed the aisles and listened intently as he spoke slowly in his deep German accent. He was exhausted after preaching and loved to relax at the luncheon parties, drinking copious amounts of Scotch, neat. After one of these, when the guests had gone home and he surely wanted more than anything to be napping, he walked with me around Smith's backyard listening to me talk about my dissertation proposal on Duns Scotus's theory of creation. He said to me, "Yes, Scotus understood zee freedom of zee Grount of

Peing.” What I remember most, however, was his kindness to a feckless graduate student.

When I was a sophomore, I went through the existential crisis of deciding that my adolescent religion of liberal Missouri Methodism, Norman Vincent Peale piety, and Warner Sallman high culture was hopeless. How was it possible to sustain religiosity of any sort, let alone some kind of Christianity, and also be a sophisticated educated person? Of course, sophomore year is the most sophisticated time of anyone’s life, and I bet most of you had a similar crisis. But then John Smith gave me Tillich’s *The Courage to Be* and it saved my life.³ Not just religion, but my very acceptance of my existence. Tillich taught me that you could not be a sophisticated, educated, person *without* being religious. That set me on the quest of finding out how best to be religious, which is what my *Philosophical Theology* trilogy is all about.⁴ Through Smith, Tillich was my intellectual grandfather, and through his writings he was my intellectual father, or at least one of them.

When I was about thirty-five, I was struggling to figure out who my philosophical audience was, who I was writing for. I was not part of any established philosophical or theological project. So, I decided to write for Paul Tillich in heaven, and that has guided my writing ever since. True, I have had to suppose that Tillich spent a lot of heavenly time learning world religions and American philosophy, but I will argue shortly that this is just what he would have done had he continued to live on until this day in pre-heavenly circumstances.

For nearly thirty years at Boston University I have taught a cycle of three courses in advanced systematic theology following the outline of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*.⁵ The first course deals with methodological issues and conceptions of God or ultimacy. The second deals with the human condition, including fundamental predicaments and ways of existentially determining personal identity. The third deals with living religiously, conceptions of God with us or the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, and the nature of religion. Although the reading list has changed every year, Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* has always been on it, one volume per course. My *Philosophical Theology* trilogy arose out of that course and follows Tillich’s order. The apples do not fall far from the tree.

God as Ultimate and Ground of Being

Tillich is known as a philosophical theologian, a title I have appropriated and which is usually understood to be in contrast to Karl Barth who was a narrative biblical and confessional theologian. In the broad framing contexts for theology, the philosophical frame says that the basic orientation is how God is related to the world and how people are related in the world to God. The narrative frame says that theology takes place in understanding God’s agency in a story of creating, redeeming, and fulfilling a divine purpose; God’s agency for Barth is in the cosmic and human person of Jesus Christ. At least this is Barth’s Christian narrative, and it has little place for alternative narratives from Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduisms and other religions, except insofar as they fit in to the Christian story. Save for Judaism, which Barth does fit into the Christian story, and Islam, most other religions do not have strong narrative theology traditions, but rather philosophical ones.

Part of the significance of Tillich’s being a philosophical theologian is that he was able to treat alternatives to Christian conceptions of God by analogy according to his category of ultimacy. He treated the Chinese Dao, Heaven, and Great Ultimate, the Hindu Brahman in various versions, and Buddhist Emptiness, also in various versions, as symbols of ultimate reality alongside equally symbolic Christian, Jewish, and Muslim conceptions of God, including sophisticated Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic conceptions. Although Tillich was not the first to use the category of ultimacy in comparing religious ideas, I take his deployment of that category as a universal comparative category for recognizing what counts as religion to be one of his most important contributions to the study of religion and to philosophical theology. This kind of comparative thinking is not possible for a theologian fundamentally oriented to a singular cosmic narrative.

Nevertheless, an important limit exists in Tillich’s practice as a philosophical theologian. He distinguished philosophy from theology by saying that, whereas philosophy examines the basic and pervasive structures of existence, theology is oriented to how those structures define human life in its ultimate dimensions.⁶ In this sense, he deliber-

ately chose to be a theologian in the *Systematic Theology*. To be sure, he was extraordinarily well educated in the history of philosophy, especially that of the Greeks, the mystics, and the German Idealists such as Hegel and Schelling. To read just about any of his works, including *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, is to receive an extraordinary education in the history of Western philosophy as well as theology.⁷ He treated most of the Christian theologians as philosophical theologians. A consequence of his distinction between philosophy and theology and choice to be the latter is that he did not pursue the philosophical side deeply enough for his theology, to my mind. You understand that the fact that all my degrees are in philosophy and none in theology does not bias this judgment in the slightest.

The first place his philosophical theology lacked philosophical depth is in his conception of God as Ground of Being. I thoroughly approve of his rejection of any conception of God as a being, either a *supernaturalistic* one or a *supranaturalistic* one.⁸ I also approve of his placing of the dialectic about God in the conversation that treats God as Being-itself in some sense, a conversation with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as well as German Idealists. All conceptions of God as a being need to be treated as broken symbols, a point to which I shall return. This point holds for all the other major symbols of the ultimate such as Dao, Heaven, Great Ultimate, Brahman, and Emptiness: all are broken symbols. A second motive Tillich had for calling God the Ground of Being was that, for him, God could only be a worthy object of ultimate concern, and no being could be such a worthy object. I share this motive.

Nevertheless, Tillich did not say much about what the Ground of Being is.⁹ It is the ground of all finite beings, but more than that. It is also the Ground of Being-itself as the ontological togetherness of all the beings. Two significantly different traditions exist in the West as well as elsewhere to articulating what this grounding means. One is the “fullness of being tradition” that says the ground is infinite being, that finite beings are whittled down versions of infinite being, and that creation is the contraction of infinite being into limited instances of being, the beings, by determination as negation. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysus, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas have versions of this fullness of

being in God and delimited instances of being in beings. Most Christian philosophical theologians in this tradition hail creation *ex nihilo* in the sense that there was no pre-existent matter out of which creatures were made; but they also hail creation *a deo* in the sense that beings are finite delimitations of infinite being or Pure Act of To Be, as Aquinas would say. The alternative, and minor, tradition says that the Ground of Being creates everything positive in beings as completely novel, as not contained within any fullness of the ground itself. Descartes is the major representative in the West of this view of creation and I hold to it myself.¹⁰ This is super-serious sense of creation *ex nihilo*. The Ground of Being is not a something upon which overflowing or contraction is worked to produce beings. Rather the ground is the ontological act creating the beings and including them as its termini. Without the act creating beings, there is nothing. No divine nature exists, or essence, or existence, or potentiality, or transcendental features such as goodness, beauty, truth, or unity, except as a consequence of the creation. The divine nature consists exclusively in what results from the creation of the beings. God or the ground is the creator of whatever is created.¹¹

I have never been able to figure out whether Tillich interpreted the Ground of Being as the fullness of being or as the completely novel ontological creation of everything determinate as finite being. I suspect he did not appreciate the difference and drew from both when convenient. He avoided causal language in discussing the grounding, including creation language except as rendered highly symbolic. I will spare you my complex, detailed, and narcoleptic arguments for the ontological creative act theory of the Ground of Being.

Because Tillich saw the Ground of Being as the object of ultimate concern, he knew that it had to be symbolized somehow as an object for religious purposes. Hence the necessity in his theology for broken symbols. The symbols must allow us to “participate” in the Ground of Being not only as the object of ultimate concern but as the agent of our redemption, overcoming estrangement from the ground of our being. Nevertheless, the ground cannot be an object in any usual sense, for that would make it *a* being or give it characters, however otherwise infinite or simple. Christianity and

other Western religions have taken a model of human personhood and purified it so as to emphasize the agency and intentionality of the Ground of Being. Tillich objected to personifying God in any way that would make God *a* being, but did say that God is beyond personhood and more than personal, an appeal to the fullness of being tradition.¹² He worked hard to revalorize Christian symbols of the personal God while insisting that God as Ground of Being is still beyond anything personal. I think the heart of his position is that human beings become normatively personal in the process of overcoming estrangement from the Ground of Being that is not personal at all. Nevertheless, that ground, for Tillich, needs to be objectified in a symbol to be the object of human ultimate concern.

I would supplement Tillich's point by arguing that there are two other symbolic or metaphorical traditions for brokenly symbolizing the ontological creative act that has no nature except for what comes from creating the beings constituting the world. The South Asian traditions begin with the notion of the human person but push it in the direction of pure consciousness, not agency or intentionality. The Hindu traditions in various versions push from personal consciousness in meditation to universal Atman to Brahman beyond any qualities whatsoever, Nirguna Brahman. Buddhist traditions push from consciousness in meditation to focusing on the arising and ceasing of items of consciousness to eliminating any substrate of consciousness whatsoever, emptiness consisting in the suchness of things; the Madhyamikas go farther than the Yogacharins in this. For these traditions in diverse ways, agency, intentionality, desire, and the like are the bad sources of illusion and bondage, not the traits to be made infinite in the Ground of Being. In East Asia, both personal agency and personal consciousness disappeared early in the symbols for the ontological Ground of Being. Instead, symbols of spontaneous emergence were developed and purified in notions of the Dao, and the creativity of Heaven and Earth. The emphasis on spontaneity runs counter to the calm at the center of the consciousness symbology and counter also to the predictability one might seek in the intentionality and agency symbology. Tillich would be pleased to work around these South and East Asian symbolologies, I think.

Had Tillich lightened up on the theological limitation to thinking about the Ground of Being only in theological terms linked to human ultimate concern, I believe he would have harvested important philosophical fruit in working through what it means to be the Ground of Being and Ground of Beings. Freed from human ultimate concern, Tillich would have seen that the Ground of Being is the ground of any kinds of beings whatsoever, which he would have called, and almost did, any kinds of determinate things, or determinations of being. I have talked about "determinations of being" since my graduate school days and I got that language from Tillich.

My conclusion about determinateness, the arguments for which I shall also spare you, is that to be determinate is to be a harmony consisting of components harmonized, a form in which they are harmonized, existential location with respect to every other harmony with respect to which the harmony is determinate, and the value of getting these components together in this form relative to these other harmonies. Anything whatsoever that is determinate has to have these four traits: form, components formed, existential location relative to others, and the value of all that. Because there would be no ontological creative act, no Ground of Being in my sense, without the actual creation of some determinate things, these four transcendental traits of determinateness are cosmologically ultimate, that is, they obtain as ultimate conditions in any cosmos whatsoever. This treatment of determinateness is so abstract or metaphysical as to apply to any cosmos, conceived any way. You might hold to an Aristotelian cosmos of substances, or a Confucian-Daoist cosmos consisting of changes, both of which are kinds of harmony. I doubt that Tillich was influenced by the Chinese yin-yang conception of the cosmos of changes, but he was much influenced by the sense of cosmic change in German Idealism, as illustrated in his discussions of life and spirit in *Volume Three* of his *Systematic Theology*. He was also wedded to the Aristotelian/medieval distinction between essence and existence, which to my mind is not very helpful for his account of estrangement and reconciliation in *Volume Two*.

So, I would encourage Tillich listening from heaven above to acknowledge, from a philosophical point of view, five ultimates: the ontological ul-

timate of the Ground of Being and the four cosmological ultimates of form, components formed, existential location, and achieved value identity. Shortly I shall argue that, when those five ultimates are addressed from the human point of view, they constitute five religious problematics relative to concern.

What can we now say about the “being” of which the Ground of Being is ground? The ontological creative act is creative of beings, whatever they might turn out to be as determinate things. Nevertheless, the beings are created together across space and time, and across whatever other dimensions of determinate reality exist. This ontological togetherness of the earlier and later, proximate and distant, and all other features of existential fields, is more than the cosmological ways in which things determine one another. It is a feature of the ontological creative act that its terminus is the ontological togetherness of all determinate harmonies embracing all determinate and partially indeterminate changes. Any one harmony thus has both ontological depth because it is part of the ontological creative act and ontological breadth because it is together with, and partly defined by, all the other things within the ontological togetherness of all things.¹³ I think I can see heavenly Tillich nodding approvingly.

Broken Symbols

I have mentioned Tillich’s use of the notion of broken symbols several times and want to approve and deepen it. My book, *The Truth of Broken Symbols*, is an explicitly Tillichian project.¹⁴ The first thing I like about Tillich’s broken symbols notion is its attack on literalism, literalism concerning God and most religious engagements of ultimacy. Tillich’s is an apophatic theology all the way down, even if he did say once that the identification of God with Being-itself is meant literally (but Being-itself cannot be described literally). The second thing I like about Tillich’s broken symbols is that religion cannot do without them. Only because we have those symbols can we participate in the ontological and ultimate affairs of deep religion. Without those broken religious symbols, we are left with ontic superficialities of modern thought. Rudolf Bultmann thought those basic religious symbols could be broken and then translated almost if not entirely

without remainder into the ontological existentialism of his day. For Bultmann, although those symbols are important for exegesis of the Bible, in the long run they can be supplanted. As I read Tillich, however, for the most part the existential philosophy and psychoanalysis he shared with Bultmann served as a living context that allows us to re-engage the broken symbols so as to participate in the ultimate realities. Existential philosophy, indeed existentialist culture with its art and other elements, is inadequate on its own. I think the recognition of this is why Tillich always said Christianity is based on the revelation of Jesus Christ as the New Being in the first century. Something revelatory and new came about then that is captured in the fundamental Christian symbols that allows us to engage ontological depths and breadth that is inaccessible without them, however broken. I have trouble with Tillich’s account of the historicity of Jesus but approve his account of the historicity of the revelatory symbols of Jesus as New Being. I also believe other religions have such innovative or revelatory symbols at their founding base and developed in axial points; these symbols cannot be evacuated with no remainder without losing the ontological depth and breadth of the religious traditions and their symbols. I trust that Tillich would agree now, having discussed the matter with Confucius, the Buddha, Mohammed, Abhinavagupta, Vasubandhu, and others. I trust that Tillich and Bultmann would have talked the matter through as well.

The chief problem with Tillich’s notion of broken symbols is that it is at best a metaphor appealing to a philosophical history of Platonic and Neo-Platonic participation theory. Plato’s refutation of participation in the *Parmenides* does not help Tillich’s case. Nor does an appeal to a Neo-Platonic One in which everything participates by degrees, especially in light of Tillich’s significant reversal of the direction of ontological transcendence, not up to the Three, the Two, and the One but down to the ground, the depths, and the abyss. (Tillich’s reversal of the metaphorical direction of transcendence is one reason why I believe he does not fit comfortably into the “fullness of being” camp: the abyss is empty but shoots up creative fire—think Berdyaev.) Tillich did not do a sufficient philosophical job in unpacking his notion of broken symbols.

I undertook that philosophical job in *The Truth of Broken Symbols* but had to appeal to yet another intellectual father, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's pragmatic semiotics, of which Tillich knew little or nothing, provides philosophical underpinnings for a theory of broken symbols engaging ultimate realities. I developed the notion of ultimate conditions of existence as finite/infinite contrasts and argued that by interpreting them, religious interpreters could engage both the finite side of the symbols and the non-finite or infinite side that carried the weight of the unconditioned. The notion of "contrast" comes from Whitehead, whose lovechild Frankenberg also says I am; I provided the analysis of the radical contingency of the creation that makes the creative act itself, form, components formed, existential location, and achieved value identity ultimates in their own right. Each is an unconditioned boundary condition of existence, and each an object of interpretation.¹⁵ Since that book, I have deepened my analysis (in a yet unpublished book called *Metaphysics of Goodness: Harmony and Form, Beauty and Art, Obligation of Personhood, Flourishing and Civilization*) by expanding my theory of truth as the carryover of value from the object interpreted into the interpreting experience as qualified by the biology, culture, semiotics, and purposes of the interpreters.¹⁶ From Dewey I borrowed and expanded the notion of a "situation" as a harmony of many ecosystems of harmonies modifying causalities in relation to human experience and interpretation. Revelatory broken symbols can give access to ultimate realities and still be modified so that their brokenness does not mislead the interpreters. I am a lovechild also of Dewey. (Thank goodness Tillich seems to have approved of polyamory!)

Wesley Wildman, another Tillich lovechild, pushes back against my defense of broken symbols, not my philosophical account so much as my attempt to justify Tillich's claim that we cannot do without the broken symbols. In his forthcoming *In Our Own Image*, he stresses the downsides and plain mischief that come with anthropomorphic symbols of God, and in his forthcoming *Effing the Ineffable*, he presents his own account of how religious language can deal with deep mysteries, with little essential need for traditional symbols. I hope our conversation can continue.

Ultimate Concern

Let us now return to Tillich's strictly theological project of engaging ultimate reality or the Ground of Being in terms of human ultimate concern. Tillich said that two formal criteria of theology exist:

The object of theology is what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us.¹⁷

Our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being. Only those statements are theological which deal with their objects in so far as it can become a matter of being or not-being for us.¹⁸

My own definition of religion is directly Tillichian in relation to this. I say that:

Religion is human engagement of ultimacy, expressed in cognitive articulations, existential responses to ultimacy that give ultimate definition to the individual and community, and patterns of life and ritual in the face of ultimacy.¹⁹

A short way to say this is that religion is engagement of ultimacy in cognitive, existential, and practical ways. The cognitive ways are theology, broadly understood. The existential ways are "that which determines our being or not-being," in Tillich's language. Tillich was not much interested in religious practices, rituals, and practical religious living but he did not deny them. I develop the notion of engagement from Dewey's theory of experience as transaction or interaction of an organism with its environment and it is a somewhat more general philosophical notion than Tillich's "concern." Tillich's concern came from Heidegger and carries the baggage of an analysis of the human as *Dasein*, a highly subjective and non-naturalistic bias. If one emphasizes creation as Tillich and I do, a naturalistic interpretation of human life is easier than a transcendental one in which the world and God threaten to slide into products largely of human self-constitution. Tillich was far friendlier to nature than Heidegger was, I think.

Let me follow Tillich now and ask how human engagement of ultimacy determines our being or non-being, beginning with engaging the cosmological ultimates.²⁰

The cosmological ultimate trait of form is faced by human beings mainly as possibilities with various kinds of goodness or value. Many of these possibilities are ones that will be actualized by our choices, individually and conjointly. What we choose determines both what will happen and also our own characters as choosing agents. We lie under obligation in the sense that our moral and creative character comes from our choices. All religions have a problematic of righteousness, expressed in many different ways, including issues about knowing the competing goods in possibilities, guilt for bad choices, modes of punishment and reconciliation. It is an ultimate condition of human life to lie under obligation. Tillich did not focus very much on morality; like Schleiermacher, he wanted to distinguish the religious concerns from moral ones. But I think the deep meaning of his distinction between our essential nature on the one hand and the existential nature we have by virtue of being thrown into choosing on the other hand was his version of the problematic of living under obligation.²¹ I hope to have developed that point in more detail in my own writings.

The cosmological ultimate trait of bringing together the many components of human life gives rise to the religious problematic of attaining wholeness, of selfhood, of overcoming suffering, of losing or gaining the self. Religions have widely different versions of what this problematic means. The authenticity of selfhood was a primary focus for Tillich and his existentialist compatriots. His dialectics of estrangement and reconciliation, of the predicaments of balancing out dynamics and form, individuation and participation, freedom and destiny, generally focused on attaining wholeness of self, or reconciliation to fragmentation without estrangement in ongoing life.

The cosmological ultimate trait of having existential location relative to other harmonies within creation gives rise to the religious problematic of relating rightly to others, treating them with compassion, as we ourselves would like to be treated. Within Christianity and nearly every other religion, this is the problematic of love and hate, attention to and estrangement from others. Tillich was deeply committed to this as the material of proper ultimate concern. Since his time, we have become more acutely aware of the proper comportment to non-human things in our environment for which

“love” is perhaps not the right word. I have analyzed this in *Metaphysics of Goodness* as conformation to the real nature of things in truth, morality, rightness, and virtue.

The cosmological ultimate trait of achieving a goodness or value by having a harmony’s components integrated by its form in its assorted existential locations is, from the human perspective, the problematic of the meaning of life, of personal life and of existence as such, the cumulative perspective that might register a person’s value, and so forth. This has at least two levels. The first is that the very existence of a person (or anything else) as a harmony means that the person has a goodness or beauty in himself or herself, however good or bad the person is for other things. The second is that a person’s real identity is the combination of subjective identity through what the person does with what is given and the objective identity of how the person affects other things. The mystery of the meaning of a person’s life is that there is no perspective that can register both the subjective and objective sides of identity except Being-itself or God or the ontological creative act as the ontological context in which all things are mutually relevant, both subjectively in themselves and objectively in others. Tillich dealt at length with the loss of meaning in bourgeois culture and religion, and rightly identified it with the problem of losing touch with ontological depths and breadth.²² I have expanded the theological problematic through the symbologies of many more religions and cultures than Tillich explored.²³

The *ontological* ultimate trait of the radical contingency of the world on the ontological creative act or Ground of Being, when engaged by human beings, gives rise to the deep religious problematic of affirming or denying our existence, of choosing life or death in Deuteronomy’s sense, of living in gratitude and acceptance or in negativity and malicious destructiveness. For Tillich, this was a matter of organizing all the other aspects of religion around accepting our acceptance by the Ground of Being, which gives us ontological goodness, versus affirming our estrangement.

Tillich was true to the German Idealistic passion for unity. He tried to handle all the dimensions of human estrangement and reconciliation into the New Being through the relation of individuals to

the Ground of Being. I prefer to give the cosmological ultimates their due and treat the existential predicaments of righteousness, wholeness, compassionate engagement, and existential meaning separately, and see how they interweave. This allows us to acknowledge many more religions than existential Christianity and see how they differently develop and emphasize these problematics. But Tillich was right that all the other ultimates of life to be engaged depend on the contingent existence of the world, the ontological ultimate problematic. I hope that my philosophical theology is a way of distinguishing the ultimate problematics of religious engagement, integrating them, and nesting them in various ways in different kinds of religious lives.

In addition to the predicaments Tillich so often discussed are the ecstatic fulfillments that are also related to the ecstasies of accepting obligation, selfhood, otherness, meaning, and bliss in feeling the ontological creative act. Tillich discussed ecstasy in terms of Spirit. It meant for him both getting unstuck from our predicaments and enjoying the creativity of the Ground of Being in our own existence. One can understand Tillich's situation, living through two World Wars, as inclining him to worry about the predicaments, and treating ecstasy itself as an instrument of resolving the predicaments. But I think the ecstasies have a quasi-independent function and can enrich a religious life with very few if any of the ultimate predicaments being resolved. If Tillich had focused more on the ultimate meaning of dancing and singing, he would not have had to depend so much for happiness on polyamory.

Philosophical Theology

In closing I want to return to the theme of philosophical theology. I hope to have sounded Tillich's praises as a philosophical theologian while also expressing my wish that he had been more thoroughly philosophical. My first claim about philosophical theology is that it should take as its public anyone from any tradition or situation who might have an interest in the topic under discussion. This means orienting one's hypotheses and arguments to the languages and cultural symbol systems of the vast *mélange* of religious and theological positions today. For theological erudition to

get started means now learning comparative theology on a fairly grand scale. Getting the basic texts of the world's religions and knowledge of their practices into European languages is far more advanced today than in Tillich's day.

Tillich began his *Systematic Theology* with the claim that theology is a function of the Christian church, meaning that he was doing only Christian theology.²⁴ He also claimed at the beginning that theology is involved in a theological circle relating our situation to the original revelatory kerygma and back again. I think now it was unwise for him to tie theology to Christian theology or to the church. Of course, any good theology ought to be helpful to Christians and the church, but also to Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, Daoists, Jews, Muslims, Pagans, and purely secular people. But Tillich's position lacks the insights that Christian theologians might learn about their topics by seeing what non-Christian thinkers said about them. You cannot understand even the Christian theological tradition, even its kerygma, only from the inside. I think that later in his life, after travel in Asia and in writing *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, Tillich was coming around to my view that the proper public for theology is anyone interested in the topic and therefore theology needs a form that addresses their ways of thinking theologically. Theology for him is about the truth of the theological topics, not about defining loyalty to a group identity.

With regard to the theological circle, I have already argued that the traditional symbols of all religions should be mined for their potentials to engage us with ultimate realities. The symbols should not be given up just because they are broken. So I agree with Tillich's affirmation of the theological circle, except that so many such relevant circles exist.

Nevertheless, we have a huge problem with the systematic character of theology. Tillich was brilliant in presenting explosive flashes of insights, such as in *The Religious Situation*, *Dynamics of Faith*, *The Courage to Be*, and *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*.²⁵ Yet even in those little books he wrote with self-consciousness of the larger historical and theoretical places of their topics. He was a truly systematic philosophical theologian in the sense that he knew that a change in one part of the system likely demands changes in many other parts. Moreover, he expressed his system as a whole in a

large, three-volume systematic theology. I am pleased to have followed him in this too, although I might be the only Tillichian so far to do so. But his system dealt almost exclusively with Christianity and the secular world of philosophy and culture at the boundary of Christianity. His autobiographical book, *On the Boundary*, illustrated the point that he lived within the bounds of Christianity and within what was just beyond those bounds.²⁶ Nevertheless, a theological system today needs to inhabit all the theological worlds and their different secular contexts. Religions and theological worlds are not distinguished by boundaries. Instead, they interweave through historical and conceptual intermixing. If we begin with our “religious situation” (Tillich’s phrase), our theological resources and their alternatives are global, cross-cultural, and sortable in many ways.²⁷ A contemporary theological system needs to deal with dozens of theological circles, interpreting foundational revelatory texts and practices with all their historical confluences and divergences. A contemporary systematic theologian needs to be a master of world history as well as a master of comparative philosophy and theology. No one can truly master these things and so we are especially vulnerable to correction in matters of history and conceptual universal perspicacity.

Ours is a time when the opposite theological sensibility prevails. Many think that only contextual theology is relevant because it has a practical, for instance, liberative, focus, and humble because it makes to no pretense to understand the perspectives, ideas, and judgments of others. Tillich is the last great counter-argument to contextual theology, showing it to be irresponsible and arrogant in what it prides itself in neglecting. I am confident that Tillich in heaven is writing furiously to expand his system to relate to all religious experience in order to combat the contextualism of postmodernism as he did the contextualism of Barth and Evangelical Christianity. “Tillich in heaven” is a broken signal signifying a task for us philosophical theologians.

RESPONSE

SHARON PEEBLES BURCH

I took real delight in learning of Nancy Frankenberg’s characterization of you as Tillich’s

lovechild—what a great way to call attention to the parallels between your work and his.

The topic on which I see a particular affinity is the development of the idea that an ontological creative act is as close as we can come to defining the Source of all that is. Tillich struggled to release the concept of God from its moorings in human invention, and your work extends his efforts. What I think is particularly compelling is the way that your work underscores the significance and importance of the immanent. That is a critical and I think frequently overlooked correction to assumptions about transcendence that are often (especially, I find, in faith communities) taken for granted.

Your ideas place before us challenges to change, some of which I find comforting, and some of which I find anxiety producing. For the most part, I read your paper with pleasure and equanimity. Much of that is due to my involvement with Tillich’s work on Being-Itself. It prepared me to encounter as exciting the idea of an ontological creative act as a dynamic description of what is intended by the word “God.” Without that background, I realized that encountering the implications of your work could prove distinctly troubling, if not terrifying.

But before I go any further, I’d better take a moment to deal with the question of which of Tillich’s statements about Being-Itself I am referring to. It is not the flat-footed assertion in Volume One that the only non-symbolic statement that can be made about God is that God is Being-Itself. I am far more closely aligned with Tillich’s statement in the introduction to Volume Two where, in what he calls a “partial reformulation” of some ideas in Volume One, he says that “everything we say about God is symbolic.”

Those two statements have existed side by side ever since the first two volumes of the Systematics were published. He never refuted his statement in Volume One, which continues to this day to be printed with that original formulation in place. As recently as the 2011 AAR, Durwood Foster and Rob James argued about which of the two formulations represented the “true Tillich.” Rob James argued that the statement in Volume One represented the true Tillichian view — that the view he expressed in Volume Two was a misstep, a momentary lapse of judgment. Durwood Foster took

the opposite point of view. He felt the reformulation in Volume Two most closely represented Tillich's position, and rued the fact that Tillich never clearly refuted the statement in Volume One. As he said in a 2015 article for the Tillich Society Bulletin, "To say in one place firmly that it is one way, and then later state pointedly that it is another way, amounts to more than a 'partial reformulation.'" (God and Being Itself, 2015).

To underscore his argument that the Volume Two assertion was Tillich's working assumption right up to the end of his life, Durwood quoted a paragraph from the Earl Lectures of 1963, which he edited and published in 1996 under the title *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*. In course of those lectures, Tillich said:

Let us avoid objectifying statements about the holy. Let us avoid giving it names, even the traditional ones of theology. When we do give it names...then let us always have a yes and a no in our statements. It is remarkable how the biblical language, especially the Old Testament, presents a very concrete God whom it seems everyone could make into an object alongside other objects. But try it. This God will evade you. You never can fix this God. Hence the prohibition to name God, since a name is something you can grasp, something which tries to "define" or make finite. This is the greatness of the biblical language. It avoids objectifying. In all great religious experiences, the divine appears and disappears...For this we have the word "epiphany," which means the appearing of an ungraspable divine power—being there and not being there. This "yes and no" is the foundation of all speaking about the divine.²⁸

That is the statement that resonates with my understanding of Tillich's enterprise. I want to be clear about that. Your work furthers Tillich's lifelong exploration of what it would mean to recognize, internalize, and accept the concept that God, the Divine, Transcendent, Sacred is without referent. It can be inferred, it can be suggested, it can be intuited—but it cannot be described, quantified, or defined.

As I said earlier, what I find particularly compelling is the way that your work underscores the significance and importance of the immanent, a topic that deserves more focus and investigation

than it has received to date—an opinion I derived at least in part when I was teaching a Doctor of Ministry seminar at San Francisco Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian institution.

The course was entitled "Theology of Ministry" and it was the first course required in the core curriculum for the degree. Since the class consisted of experienced pastors, one of its purposes was to help the students become aware of their underlying theological assumptions. The hope was that they would be able to work creatively to expand the number and quality of the theological insights that undergirded their ministries. On the first day of class, I asked them to introduce themselves and to reflect on their most recent sermon and how it was received by a church member of their choice, for example, a single mother who had two teenage children, a full-time job, and limited economic means. What did the sermon offer to her? Or how did it provide succor, reassurance, and promise to a family working to provide for a beloved dad now afflicted with Alzheimer's? It quickly became clear that my request made little or no sense to them. They were ready and able to describe how their sermons reflected current scholarly Biblical perspectives, presented theological interpretations that were cogent and helped the congregation develop a more sophisticated faith, challenged members of the church to be more sensitive to social injustice and offered ways in which beneficences would benefit both the church and the community. But how did it affect a congregation member? That proved surprisingly evasive—unless they were describing someone who reacted negatively to a specific theological issue. I was taken aback. As a Tillichian, I have a deep and abiding conviction that what makes my teaching, pastoring, or writing important is that it addresses real life concerns of real live people. This was not true for my students. They assumed they knew the questions that people had. They didn't need to ask.

In addition, they were quite clear that they had come to the Doctor of Ministry program to learn "tips, tricks, and techniques" that would serve to polish their already considerable expertise. My job was to offer them tools that they could use to promote their perspectives. I found myself quite put out by what I took to be their complacency. As I began to poke around, looking for where I could connect with their existential questions and make

this course meaningful for them, I ran into a lot of bromides that crop up in times of confusion and pain. The students in my class all seemed to have a common relationship to ideas of transcendence—for example, God is an all-powerful heavenly being that can intervene and muck about in events and individual lives. Thus, if tragedy strikes, they feel free to explain that this God they are speaking of has a plan, and this tragedy is part of that plan; everything works together for good for those who love God; we may not understand why this has happened to us, but that is because we can't see the larger picture—in other words, spiritual aspirin that hopefully would dull the pain.

I realized they also read Scripture from this emphasis on transcendence. For example, the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well could have begun with a reminder to the disciples at about 10 am that morning when Jesus hitched up his britches and said “Hey, we'd better get going—I have to meet this woman at a well by 2 pm today.” In other words, this event was a foreordained meeting manipulated by divine intervention to illustrate the purposes of God. But if this is considered from the standpoint of the immanence inferred by your “ontological creative act,” it took place because it was possible. From this view the lesson that it offered was not a master plan for discipleship for the followers of Jesus, not a reward to the virtue of the woman encountered, not an example of how to love others, even Samaritans, as ourselves. The woman experienced being received and heard—and she was changed. She could not have predicted it, yearned for it above all else in her prayers, undertaken a rigorous set of spiritual disciplines in order to make it come about. It was an ontologically creative moment.

Similarly, why would Jesus talk to Matthew? He grew up in Nazareth, and he knew full well that one didn't talk to the town tax collector—he was a traitor because he worked for the Roman occupiers, he regularly and as a matter of course took advantage of the people of the town, and talking to him would render Jesus unclean in the eyes of the temple authorities—why ever would he have done that? The temptation was to assume the transcendent view—Jesus just knew that Matthew would be a devoted and dedicated disciple and write a Gospel about his teachings. But if this is considered from the standpoint of an ontological creative act,

the focus shifts to Matthew. How could he listen to this invitation and receive it with such confidence that he invited Jesus and his disciples over to his home the next evening? That would have ended Matthew's career as a tax collector, including the money he enjoyed spending and the position that tax collecting afforded him in Roman society. If we read this as a portrayal of the immanence of the Divine in human existence, it is Matthew's “yes” that is the miracle in this story.

The more I considered the attitudes I was encountering, the more I realized that they stemmed from a pervasive outlook that attributed to God and to God's glory the way that churches are structured, clergy is trained and supported, and liturgies are conducted—in other words, a transcendent view that minimizes contingency and change. But facing the full implications of immanence as a primary aspect of how humans apprehend the Sacred can be terrifying, and the reactions of my students gave me an insight into just how appropriate the word “terrify” was to the topic. I did not realize I would encounter reactive fear and resistance to change to the degree I did, and it truly gave me pause. I began to ponder just how close the contemporary theological scene comes to idolatry by absolutizing transcendence. Your ideas challenge that pattern of assumptions by suggesting that the creative force of the universe, that out of which we came, that from which we feel ourselves separated, that with which we yearn to be reunited, requires us to accept radical immanence—before which we stand, struck dumb because we can do nothing other than to be silent in the face of that which is coming to be, and lend ourselves to that energetically and wholeheartedly.

The question then becomes what we as theologians do—many of us engaged in training clergy—do to equip ourselves and those with whom we work to provide succor and relief when we encounter the tragic circumstances that are all too often a part of everyday existence? What do I say to the husband and children of the woman who was killed in the Las Vegas massacre? Or to the refugees who lost family members, pets, belongings and homes to the recent wildfires quite near my home in California? How do I offer comfort to the friends and families of the pedestrians in New York who were killed by the truck driven by a religious fanatic? Am I saying that God, by whatever set of assumptions

I recognize that term, is actually present to such things? And the answer is yes, because if we take what Tillich introduced and you have elegantly developed, we have to.

And that brings me to what I find comforting about radical immanence. There are no moments when any created anything can be separate from that act out of which all things emerge. Humanly unknowable potential is present. The fact that we do not understand or comprehend it does not change that fact. What is certain is that an “ontological creative act” is in process. What that is remains a mystery and always will. Because this immanence requires the ability to withstand the fear, instability, and terror that frequently accompanies the learning of something new—and always learning something new—the human yearning for comfort, certainty, reassurance and mastery is constantly being challenged. As theologians, we are aware of the yearning of fellow human beings for certainty and stability. How do we present the promise and hope implicit in the radical immanence of God to our everyday lives? We are in the presence of a remarkable opportunity. How do we lend ourselves to being in harmony with that which comes forth—how does one support life, nurture promise, aid growth, allow change, identify barriers and help remove them? And how do we tolerate the need to constantly be in the process of discernment since what was accepted as a constant yesterday may not meet today’s needs?

One of the most basic assumptions that radical immanence affects concerns the role and reign of human beings. Far from being the motive force of creation and masters of all that we survey, we are being humbled by finding ourselves participants in a vaster and far more complex reality than ever before we have conceived. I find it interesting that science is experiencing this same de-centering of human mastery. It is speaking openly about what is not yet known—dark matter, dark holes, chaos theory, string theory, dark energy. Astrophysicists assert that 94% of everything is either dark energy or dark matter, and they don’t know what either is just yet. They don’t know if the experiments they have initiated to help them explore phenomena will produce helpful data—they have to wait and see—just as we theologians must. Both fields are experiencing the reorientation that a serious consideration of the importance of the immanent demands.

In 1955, Tillich heralded this sort of change with a volume of sermons that he entitled *The New Being*.²⁹ He defines “New Being” as the state of being reconciled to the Source of all that is. Not because of being religious, not by virtue of having faith and believing, not because of evincing a particular set of religious convictions, but because New Being is available to all humanity without any qualification. He describes everything as proceeding from New Being and declares that cultural, religious, and philosophic divisions cannot impede that truth. He takes great pains to explain that the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are one of the ways that New Being has been revealed, but New Being is an aspect of what it means to be religious in whatever form that takes—Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism—or secular movements, like Scientism, Secularism, or the New Atheism, any set of convictions that hold their precepts to be ultimately true. New Being isn’t something that has swooped in and taken over, but something that exists and has always existed. It is an insight for all humanity, not limited to those who believe in Jesus as the Christ.

We are in the presence of constantly creative Source out of which the new can emerge. Silent before it we search to accept the new and work toward maintaining our focus on what creative, constructive aspect can be raised up, brought forward, incorporated into what is taking place.

In these times, what would this consist of? We don’t know. We won’t ever know. But being presented with the option, being helped toward conceiving of what it means to be in the presence of an ontological creative act is essential. This is such creative, constructive and important work you’ve placed before us. Thank you!

RESPONSE

WESLEY J. WILDMAN

In borrowing the metaphor of lovechild to characterize his relationship to Paulus Tillich, Robert Cummings Neville is both making a kind of joke and affirming something extremely serious. I’ll offer brief reflections on the joke and longer thoughts on the serious point of his self-description.

The joke refers to Tillich’s pattern of powerful romantic attachments with other women, including

students, which may sometimes have turned sexual. I have taught Tillich's life and thought every second year for a couple of decades now, and every time students struggle to come to terms with this aspect of Tillich's behavior, which might well have led to public excoriation in our time, especially if one of the students had complained about unwanted romantic or sexual advances. History helps, I have found, as always. Here's my best understanding, garnered from as much as I've been able to read and as many people as I've been able to talk with, including the inimitable Durwood Foster, of blessed memory.

Hannah and Paulus had found one another after the Great War, which brought to army chaplain Paulus bleak despair, psychological breakdowns, heartbreak, and betrayal as his wife became pregnant through an affair with his best friend. In the frazzled nerves and desperate existential searching of post-war German culture, Paulus dove into the intensity offered within the artistic, literary, and intellectual activities of the salons where groups of friends formed. There he met Hannah, who was doing something similar, looking for her own kind of healing. Paulus ultimately drew Hannah away from a probably unhappy marriage, essentially doing to Hannah's husband what had been done to Paulus by his friend. Paulus and Hannah were drawn toward the kind of passionate love that seemed to be the only way to make sense of personal life, the only reality worth cultivating.

Hannah and Paulus had negotiated an open marriage from the start. This was a result of their determination to place love above all else in life, a post-World War I Bohemian commitment that displaced Paulus's earlier puritanicalism and fulfilled Hannah's endlessly sensual aspirations. That's an historical context that's critical to grasp, since otherwise it is obscure why two young people in love with one another would so deliberately flaunt social conventions about love and marriage. For both of them, society contained, compressed, and limited love, whereas they felt destined to keep the light of love alive in all of their dealings with other people. For both, this meant intense connections with others, probing existential conversations whenever possible, the baring of souls so as to encounter others heart-to-heart, and sometimes the sharing of bodies—especially for Hannah, as she recounts in

her autobiographical reflections in *From Time to Time*.³⁰

For Paulus, inevitably, this sometime involved relationships that crossed the boundaries between people of relatively different power, as between professor and student, doctor and patient, or therapist and client. We have seen that go wrong so many times, becoming (or beginning as) exploitative and harmful, that many institutions in our time seek to regulate relationships across large power differentials. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, none of Tillich's (or Hannah's) partners ever complained or were damaged in this process, though of course this may have occurred silently. I think Hannah and Paulus did reasonably well at sticking to their principles, placing holistic love above social conventions and containers, and seeking to draw out from the depths of culture all the beauty and intense passion they could.

Everything is ambiguous, however, and Hannah's and Paulus's love principle is no exception. I think we see this most clearly in the hurt Hannah felt over time. For her, unlimited love was especially a sensual journey with the power to heal and comfort past trauma, to which she alludes in *From Time to Time*. But it appears that nothing she ever did with others cast a shadow over her love for Paulus. For Paulus, by contrast, this journey was less about sensuality, and more about existential connection and realizing in the moment the intense depths of nature. He was more likely to become infatuated, to fall into a fantasy of love, than he was to seek sexual satisfaction. I believe this is something Hannah had not bargained on when she negotiated a love-first open marriage. She thought it would be for Paulus like it was for her, a sensual extension of their shared emotional attachment, their unbreakable bond. She really did not like his serial romantic attachments. He appears to have refused to discuss or even acknowledge the mounting problem, which amounts to a refusal to renegotiate the terms of the marriage when renegotiation was precisely what was required to fulfill love's demand, supposedly the overriding principle driving the arrangement. Paulus's end-of-life apology to Hannah for knowingly hurting her, an apology that she seems to have accepted, is telling. He had known what he was doing to her but he enjoyed it, he savored it, and he didn't want to change.

Despite her acceptance of Paulus's apology, Hannah's hurt is amply evident in *From Time to Time*, published after Paulus died. Indeed, Paulus's friend Rollo May rushed into print his own psychologically penetrating biography of Paulus³¹ to correct what he felt were distortions in Hannah's book. As a result, we have more information than we have ever had about the personal life of a great philosophical theologian. This is a mixed blessing. We only found out about Karl Barth's rejection (or transcending) of the conventions of marriage because of leaks around the stopper of his family's attempt to protect his professional reputation. But we don't have Barth's account, or his wife's, of this critical life decision. If we know something about a person's boundary-breaking love, perhaps it is better to know as much as possible, so that we can honestly reconstruct the thinking and feeling behind the ambiguities of the associated decision. And if we know nothing, we can focus on the intellectual accomplishments without distraction from the messy realities of personal life.

Neville has made different life choices than Paulus, Hannah, and Karl Barth. He is more Confucian than all of them, seeing wisdom in the social conventions that contain and constrain love, and being open to but suspicious of the Daoist-like, Bohemian rejection of socially supported regulation of sexual and romantic intensity. Note that Neville is far from puritanical in his appraisal of Tillich's life and loves. He grasps the adventure and respects the attempt to place love above all. But he prefers the ambiguities of ordered institutional support of self-regulation to the ambiguities of freewheeling regulation-free exploration of life's intensities. In this respect, he is very much *not* Tillich's lovechild.

Like all children, even those of the lovechild kind, Neville's thought exhibits many places of resistance to the powerful parent, places where Neville's way of thinking diverges from Tillich's, sharply or subtly. One way to approach such places of divergence is to compare the three volumes of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (*ST*) with the three volumes of Neville's *Philosophical Theology* (*PT*), as filtered by Neville's own remarks, to which this essay is a response.

Let's begin with the category of ultimate reality. Neville says Tillich invented it but it was actually

Max Weber's invention, originally. Yet Tillich certainly did a lot of theological good with the idea, including establishing "the category of ultimacy or ultimate reality as a universal comparative category for recognizing what counts as religion." In Part II of *ST*, "Being and God," Tillich demonstrates the function of ultimate reality as a comparative category by surveying and summarizing a formidable array of ultimacy ideas from the history of religions. The categorization he applies to this phenomenological smorgasbord of ultimacy concepts is less than compelling and has not been particularly influential. Nevertheless, the very fact that he employed a comparative category in the way he did was groundbreaking for Christian theology.

Neville moves along the same paths in his *PT*, the light handed down from Tillich held high. Where the academic study of religion is paralyzed by the problem of defining religion in a way that is adequate to the varied phenomena we are inclined to call religious, Neville boldly stipulates a definition of religion in terms of the presence of ultimate concern, which when properly ordered is authentic engagement with ultimate reality. Neville is not particularly interested in using the word "religion" to describe human activities that lie outside the scope of this definition. Of course, solving the problem of defining religion through stipulation will never fly with experts in the academic study of religion, for whom the delicacy of the issue resolves around the furiously diverse intricacies of the beliefs, behaviors, experiences, and objects we are inclined to describe as religious. But Neville's instincts are all about philosophical clarity, and Tillich is his greatest ally in this respect. Here we definitely have a lovechild situation.

Neville claims that he is more mindful of philosophical depth and precision than Tillich was, at least the Tillich of the *ST*. I think that claim is generally correct. Tillich was interested in staying within the theological circle, and only drew on philosophical analysis when it suited his broadly theological purposes in *ST*. Yet my sense is that Tillich has more going on philosophically than Neville acknowledges.

For instance, Neville objects that Tillich didn't say much about what ground of being is. In particular, Tillich didn't resolve the fundamental question of whether Tillich belongs to the camp holding that the ground of being is the fullness of being,

or to the camp holding that the ground of being is “the completely novel ontological creation of everything determinate as finite being.” Neville suspects that Tillich “did not appreciate the difference and drew from both when convenient.” Neville himself belongs in the second camp, as the most radical exponent of the *creatio ex nihilo* view in the history of the western tradition, pushing the concept virtually all the way to occasionalism, with everything being created new, moment to moment, and causal relationships themselves created new, moment to moment, from eternity. This gives Neville more in common with medieval Islamic occasionalist theologians than almost all theologians of our era, which is an unusual mark of distinction. But is it really the case that Tillich failed to recognize that he needed to pick a camp?

I think Tillich’s touchstone for picturing the God-world relationship through creation is neither Thomas Aquinas nor Rene Descartes, champions of the two camps Neville seeks to foist upon Tillich, but Plotinus—and Plotinus understood not as articulating a fullness-of-being view through the process of emanation, but Plotinus understood as neutral between reflexive creation from a fullness of being and reflexive creation from abysmal nothingness. Tillich maintains this ambiguity, I think quite deliberately. Tillich never seems drawn by the Cartesian or Nevillian picture of radical creation *ex nihilo*, so Tillich represents a genuine alternative to Neville’s forced choice. It is this ambiguity in Tillich, which I feel sure is carefully cultivated and perfectly deliberate, that has made the *ST* such a rich dialogue partner for Buddhist thinkers, who recognize their own emptiness conceptions of ultimacy within Tillich’s conceptual art. At this point I am more Tillich’s lovechild than Neville is.

Moreover, Tillich’s *ST* says rather a lot about ground of being, describing its character in and through the grounding of the ontologically basic self-world correlation; the three polar elements of individualization-participation, dynamics-form, and freedom-destiny; the critical narrative contrast between essential and existential being, reflecting his formation in the absolute idealist world of Schelling; and the categories of space, time, causality, and substance (on which Tillich was already decades out of date when he published *ST* Volume One in 1951, not taking account of the way modern physics interrupts his classical interpretation of

all four concepts). In showing how these facets of ground of being matter concretely for the interpretation of human life, Tillich conveys a great deal about his central metaphor. But he does it without much sign of Neville’s abiding obsession with speculative metaphysics. Neville is a practical philosopher, to be sure, but Tillich is more practical, more existential, and more realistic about the limits of human reason. Or perhaps we should say Tillich is less adventurous and more bound by needless philosophical limitations.

Neville claims that Tillich’s focus on ultimate concern, rather than on that plus the other four cosmological ultimates Neville recommends to us in his *PT*, limits Tillich’s ability to register what is distinctively different as well as similar across the world’s manifold depictions of ultimacy. That’s correct, up to a point, but only because Tillich lacked interest in covering that question in that particular way within *ST*, not because he lacked the concepts needed for such an analysis. Indeed, the three polar elements have the potential to function as the kind of atomic theory of ultimacy that Neville secures with his five ultimates. Tillich’s atomic toolkit doesn’t have to live with the semantic awkwardness of having five ultimates (one ontological and four cosmological), which is as close to an oxymoron as you’ll ever find in Neville’s eerily consistent and magnificently precise language in *PT*. And Tillich does much better at recognizing the existential dilemmas connected with Neville’s four cosmological ultimates than Neville acknowledges. In fact, Tillich’s three polar elements are potent resources for rehearsing the existential dilemmas and distortions of the human condition, and he rings that bell over and over again in the *ST*.

Furthermore, Neville asserts that, “freed from human ultimate concern, Tillich would have seen that the Ground of Being is the ground of any kinds of beings whatsoever.” But Part IV of *ST*, on “Life and the Spirit,” makes it abundantly clear that the ground of being grounds all beings and all dimensions of being, including but not limited to the dimension of spirit that characterizes the fullness of being in human life. I feel sure that Tillich would be gratified to have us recognize his unusually forceful efforts to have all dimensions of being thoroughly embraced in his theological system. He might not mention microbes, as I’d be inclined to do, but he wouldn’t complain if someone else did.

Neville has greatly improved upon Tillich's handling of broken religious symbols—that is, symbols that point to ultimate reality as their logical object but necessarily fail to express the intended fullness and thus are broken. He has improved on Peirce as well in the same regard. I don't know what else to say about that without recounting Neville's theory of symbols, which he has already done. So, I'll just say that Neville's semiotics is far more comprehensive, far more nuanced, far more useful for analysis, and just far better.

Neville comments that Tillich's "system dealt almost exclusively with Christianity and the secular world of philosophy and culture at the boundary of Christianity." This is correct, I think, at least as a characterization of Tillich's writings up until the last decade of his life. Though published over a period of 12 years, Tillich's *ST* was written over several decades, and his thought changed a lot in that time. In the last decade of his life, Tillich did begin to engage traditions of religious thought and practice beyond the limits of Christianity. We see that particularly in some of the occasional writings of this period, but also in Volume III of *ST*, published in 1963, in which Tillich strove mightily to allow his growing awareness of other religions to impact his theological ontology. He was painfully aware that he was grappling with deep conceptual fractures in his system, and only widening the fissures by pressing toward greater adequacy in his engagement of other religions. After all, it is difficult to take Buddhism with complete seriousness on its own terms when your own view centralizes the life of Jesus the Christ as the lynch pin of history, realizing essential being under the conditions of existence, and setting lose the transformative power of that historic moment through the church.

If the concept of essential being were rendered as an ideal, realized better and worse in human affairs generally and in religious geniuses specifically, and thereby detached from history except insofar as history is the bearer of occasions of the fragmentary and ambiguous manifestation of this ideal, Tillich could have solved his problem. Troeltsch had accomplished that much before Tillich, and even Friedrich Schleiermacher was almost there at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But Tillich appears to have been too conventionally Christian to move in that direction. For him, the once-for-all historical manifestation of the concrete-absolute in

a human life, activating all dimensions of life, was *the* critical element of the Christian story. Despite his misgivings about the difficulties his approach posed for making sense of religious traditions outside of Christianity, he held what he took to be the Christian line. He reshaped his understanding of the spirit and of the spiritual community to move in a new direction, but he never crossed his self-drawn line. Also, *ST* Volumes One and Two were already published, and Tillich couldn't cross the line drawn in those volumes without destroying the *ST*'s internal coherence. Neville brashly crosses that line, however, and without any hint of anguish. Neville's theological circle is correspondingly much larger than Tillich's, embracing everyone with something serious to say or feel or think about matters of ultimate concern in human life, regardless of religious or non-religious affiliation.

In the end, Tillich realized that he had run out of time, so he was forced to release the final volume of his system into the wild, mindful that a proper solution to the conceptual fractures introduced by his flowering awareness of religious pluralism would require nothing less than a comprehensively restructured system. It is with this in mind that we should re-hear some moving sentences from the Preface to Volume Three of *ST*.

My friends and I sometimes feared that the system would remain a fragment. This has not happened, though even at its best this system is fragmentary and often inadequate and questionable. Nevertheless, it shows the stage at which my theological thought has arrived. Yet a system should be not only a point of arrival but a point of departure as well. It should be like a station at which preliminary truth is crystallized on the endless road toward truth.³²

What Tillich's emotionally bare-to-the-bones self-reflection in this passage does not envisage is the extent to which his system influenced so many others. Not many of those influenced have produced full systems, to be sure, just as Neville notes. But the influence is profound nonetheless. As far as systems are concerned, Tillich's influence is seen nowhere more clearly than in Neville's *PT*. It might be nothing more than a fond fantasy, but I picture Neville, who has always said he writes for Tillich in heaven, as having produced the kind of system that Tillich himself would have strived to produce had he lived another couple of decades with his wits

fully about him. In this fond fantasy, Neville really is Tillich's lovechild.

² For what I learned from Smith, and some reflections on his relations with Tillich, see my "John E. Smith: Doing Something with American Philosophy," in my *Defining Religion: Essays in Philosophy of Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018), chapter 17.

³ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952).

⁴ My *Philosophical Theology* is a trilogy of books: *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology Volume One* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), *Existence: Philosophical Theology Volume Two* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), and *Religion: Philosophical Theology Volume Three* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2015).

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), *Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), and *Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963). The title of my systematics, *Philosophical Theology*, was a deliberate variant on Tillich's title. Originally, I had wanted to entitle the volumes *Philosophical Theology Volume One, Volume Two, and Volume Three*, in imitation of Tillich. But the Press explained that with electronic sales and bookkeeping, my volumes would be known by the first word in the title and thus would be indistinguishable. *Ultimates*, *Existence*, and *Religion* had been my subtitles and I moved them to the first place, putting me farther from imitating Tillich than I had wished.

⁶ Systematic Theology: Volume One, pp. 8-11.

⁷ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*. Edited by Carl E. Braaten (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1957).

⁸ Systematic Theology: Volume Two, pp. 5-10.

⁹ Well, he did devote most of Part Two of his *Systematic Theology* to the question, so I exaggerate.

¹⁰ On this point in Descartes, see my *Realism in Religion: A Pragmatist's Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), chapter 13.

¹¹ All this is argued exhaustingly in my *Ultimates*.

¹² See his complicated argument in *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

¹³ This is argued at length in my *Ultimates and Existence*.

¹⁴ *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). The theory in

that book is put to work for Christian symbols in my *Symbols of Jesus: A Christianity of Symbolic Engagement* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and for Confucian symbols in *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

¹⁵ This argument pervades my *Ultimates*. Alfred North Whitehead's discussion of contrasts is in his *Process and Reality*, corrected edition by David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York, NY: The Free Press/Macmillan, 1978).

¹⁶ This theory of truth was first elaborated and defended in my *Recovery of the Measure* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), part 1.

¹⁷ Systematic Theology: Volume One, 12

¹⁸ Systematic Theology: Volume One, 14.

¹⁹ *Ultimates*, p. 4.

²⁰ This is the main argument of my *Existence*, the title of which, of course, comes from Tillich's usage.

²¹ In addition to his well-known argument in *Systematic Theology: Volume Two*, see his remarkable *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) in which he gives ontological, existential, and moral interpretations of these notions.

²² This is true from early works such as *The Religious Situation*, translated by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1932) and *The Protestant Era*, translated by James Luther Adams (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948) to his late *Systematic Theology: Volume Three*.

²³ See his beginnings with *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1963).

²⁴ See my analysis of the nearly identical beginnings of Tillich's and Karl Barth's big systematic theologies on this point in *Realism in Religion*, chapter 1.

²⁵ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

²⁶ *On the Boundary* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1966).

²⁷ This is the argument of my *Religion*.

²⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*. ed. Durwood Foster (The Pilgrim Press, 1996).

²⁹ Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955) 15-24.

³⁰ Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973).

³¹ Rollo May, *Paulus: Tillich as Spiritual Teacher* (Dallas, TX: Saybrook, 1988).

³² Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology: Volume Three, Preface.

POWER AS BASIC ELEMENT OF ANALYSIS FOR THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO FASCISM: A STUDY OF PAUL TILlich'S CONCEPT OF THE DEMONIC AND THE RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS OF KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL PRESENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD POLITICS TODAY

HO SIU PUN

Abstract

There are one proposal and one argument in this paper.¹ I propose to employ Tillich's idea of the demonic as a lens to theologically understand and respond to fascism. But before talking about this, I would first describe the ambiguity of the term "power" in Tillich's writings. This would allow us to better grasp his idea of the demonic. In the third part of this paper I argue that studying Tillich's idea of the demonic should be accompanied by the study of his two religious symbols, "Kingdom of God" and "The Spiritual Presence." Finally, I would raise some questions for further thinking about some aspects of the world politics today.

Ambiguity of "Power" in Tillich's Writings

The meaning of the English word "power" is ambiguous in Tillich's writings, in a sense that there are more than one connotations of this word. These connotations are used by Tillich symbolically. Kyle Paswark identifies three meanings in German for the term "power" in Tillich's writings.² The first one is *Kraft*. It is formless abyss of being but it rushes out and enters reality in form. It is the origin of power, *Urkräfte* which sustains all beings. The second connotation is *Mächtigkeit*, the power of form in existence. It is the inner, actual and centered power of beings. In human being, it is the personal power. The third connotation is *Macht*. It is a social power. *Macht* does not refer to a natural center in which *Mächtigkeit* utters to an individual. Instead, *Macht* is established through a creation of non-natural centers of leadership. It is a power of social position which is determined by a group of people.

Tillich's Delineation of His Idea of Demonic

Tillich talks about his idea of the demonic with his discussions of Asiatic³ and Occidental⁴ arts but this idea is equally inspirational for social analysis.⁵ Tillich once said that even his all other writings are unavoidably burnt away, those which are concerned with his idea of the demonic must be preserved.⁶ Before moving on to explicate Tillich's idea of the demonic, I need to make two remarks. First, my proposal of using Tillich's idea of the demonic is not dealing with a metaphysical problem of whether there is a potential of the demonic present in God. There are several works discussing this.⁷ What I am embarking is an attempt to understand what human beings are experiencing; Second, I am not saying fascism is identical to Tillich's concept of the demonic. I am trying to use this concept as a lens to utter a theological understanding of and respond to fascism. This lens would give us a much inspirational vision for viewing symbolically stage(s) before fascism is maturely formed but not fascism once we can name it. This will be talked more about in the following.

How does Tillich delineate the idea of the demonic? First, the demonic power can be understood as *Kraft*. It is formless but it rushes into the world by acquiring forms. For this reason, the demonic has both the destructive and the creative features as the form of this world is a structure of creativity according to Tillich. This implies two things. First, for Tillich the Demonic is different from the Satanic. The Satanic is described by him as negative principle operated in the Demonic but the Demonic has both creative and destructive strength in which Tillich describes as a dialectical depth.⁸ Second, the existence of the demonic depends on the creative. The negativity cannot live without the positivity which the demonic intends to distort.⁹ Nevertheless, the *telos*, the purpose of the demonic is to destroy the form it once existentially had. The demonic aims at destroying form by acquiring form. The consequence is its existential self-destruction.

The second delineation of Tillich's concept of demonic is its self-elevation to infinity and the absolute. While life has a self-transcendent tendency, the demonic has distorted self-transcendence because it sees the finite as infinite. It is idolatry from Tillich's perspective. Furthermore, the demonic is a structure of evil rather than individual acts of evil.¹⁰ The demonic structure possesses someone. It can become a faith demanding people to be willing to sacrifice anything or totally surrender.¹¹

Therefore, the centeredness of individual being is removed. The *Mächtigkeit* is undermined.

Tillich's Idea of the Demonic as a Lens for Viewing Fascism

How can these two delineations of Tillich's idea of the demonic act as a lens for understanding fascism? First, many critics wonder why fascism cannot be eradicated, especially in Europe after the Second World War, particularly when we consider that European people already have had their tragic and heavy history and learnings in hand. Tillich's idea of the demonic gives us an inspiration for understanding here. It seems that it is not fascism operates itself but the demonic power which "lies behind" fascism. The *telos* of the demonic causes the destruction of the form of fascism during the Second World War. Nevertheless, the demonic is not eradicated. It just "lingers" around without form. It remains a formless *Kraft*. However, it breaks into the world again and takes another form to exist. It seems that fascism just "transforms" and it is difficult to be recognized by our experience.

Fascism is originated from an Italian word *fascio* which means "a bundle". There must be some seemingly reasonable reasons so that people are grouped together. Hence, my second point is that these reasons cannot be easily said as entirely bad or evil. For example, the preliminary stage of fascism is often a stage of recession of a nation and people may just want to regain vitality. This is exemplified by the situation of Germany after the First World War. The longing for vitality is the longing for establishing individual *Mächtigkeit* and social *Macht*. This is the creative strength of the demonic. This is the reason why in my second remark before introducing Tillich's idea of the demonic, I said that it is better to use Tillich's idea of the demonic to view the condition of or stage(s) before fascism is maturely formed, because once fascism is mature so that we can name it, the Satanic of fascism can be identified and the halo or the creativity of fascism will have been weakened. The demonic may not be so "demonic" any more. Anyway, this creativity is "attractive temptation". In the book *The Courage to be*, Tillich asserts that the consideration of "vitality" must be accompanied by the consideration of "intentionality" and "intentionality" means "being directed toward meaningful contents" which is "valid logically, esthetically, ethically, religiously."¹²

Finally, "a bundle" means one is bound. This may be conscious or unconscious. As I mentioned before, fascism can have religious substance. People of fascism is "grasped" unconditionally. Religious symbols may be found in this process. For example, the slogan of "blood and soil" used by Nazi Party. This is what seen by Tillich in his *The Socialist Decision* as "myth of origin" which is a political romanticism possessing people.¹³

Strength and Weakness of using Tillich's Idea of Demonic for Viewing Fascism

As we may see, Tillich's idea of the demonic has a strong explanatory power. It utters a possible explanation for the impossibility of the eradication of fascism. It probably can answer why fascism is attractive though it has a notorious label. The self-elevation of the demonic to infinity also explains why people are fascinated and grasped by fascism. This explanatory power allows people to identify and expose the demonic and then combat it. It also avoids people from falling into the pitfall of quick and easy moral judgment, as the demonic is an evil of structure and ambiguous in nature. However, because Tillich's idea of the demonic is reflective and circumspect, it causes a difficulty in praxis. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian of Tillich's time, wrote something about Tillich in his prison cell: "The world unseated him (i.e., Tillich) and went on by itself: he (Tillich) too sought to understand the world better than it understood itself, but it felt entirely misunderstood, and rejected the imputation."¹⁴

"Kingdom of God" and "The Spiritual Presence"

Employing Tillich's idea of demonic should be accompanied by a study of Tillich's two religious symbols, the "Kingdom of God" and the "Spiritual Presence," which I think many scholars neglect to do so. It is understandable as many scholars focus their study of Tillich's idea of power from an ontological perspective because it is the ontological angle that Tillich uses for his analysis of power in his book *Love, Power and Justice*,¹⁵ which explicitly discusses power. However, I argue that we must not forget that Tillich is, after all a theologian and so we should also look deep into his religious symbols and use a religious or theological lens to study his idea of power. A set of religious symbols should

be employed for combating the demonic power because the demonic itself is a religious symbol. For Tillich, symbol points beyond itself yet itself participates in this world.¹⁶ I have mentioned before, the demonic has possessing power. If we do not use symbol but something that is only concrete and taken from the ordinary experience,¹⁷ we are running into a risk of strengthening the structure of the demonic unconsciously.¹⁸ One should use another set of religious symbols for the confrontation with the demonic because it is a struggle beyond the religious symbols.

So, how can the symbols of the “Kingdom of God” and the “Spiritual Presence” be employed for combating the demonic? First, the “Kingdom of God” is an eschatological symbol. It hints that a critical distance is needed for removing any ambiguity. Whether the creativity belongs to the demonic or the divine, we need a retrospective perspective for a complete acquirement; Second, the connotation of “Kingdom of God” is political.¹⁹ The word “Kingdom” refers to the sovereignty. It is talking about the supremacy of God.²⁰ Therefore, any claim of the absolute and unconditional demand is shattered by this religious symbol. The possessing power of fascism is always in struggle with “Kingdom of God; Third, the scope of “Kingdom” is broader than the church. Employing the word “Kingdom” implies that the church, at certain times, may fail in giving evidence of the divine. The demonic of fascism may be found in the church. Nevertheless, “Kingdom of God” is not conquered. “Kingdom of God” prevents the church from seeing itself as the absolute. For Tillich, one criteria for “Kingdom of God” is the recognition of human dignity, as every human is potentially a child of God.²¹

The struggle between the demonic and the divine can be viewed as a struggle of grasping people. The significance of “The Spiritual Presence” is to open someone to the divine and then be grasped by the Spirit. The word “Spiritual” means that there is freedom of the Spirit to resist any exclusive and fanatical claim of the divine by human being. The word “Presence” implies that “in the presence of God no man (sic.) can boast about his (sic.) grasp of God.”²² However, for Tillich the word “Presence” also implies one is aware of the divine “in spite of the infinite gap between the divine Spirit and the human spirit.” It is a “courageous standing.”²³ Tillich once vividly illustrates this paradox in one of his sermons. He said that the Spirit is like

the absent God hiding from human’s sight. It is like an empty space left by someone. It is empty but we know that it belongs to someone. The Spirit is absent, yet, we are aware of its presence.²⁴

Still, there are some criteria for the presence of the Spirit. For Tillich, one of them is love. Besides faith, love is another impact and manifestation of “the Spiritual Presence.”²⁵ Love is the reunion of the separated for Tillich. The demonic demands someone to sacrifice everything for it. Nevertheless, love would not do so. It is a “reunion of the separated in all dimensions, including that of the spirit, and not as an act of negation of all dimensions for the sake of a transcendence without dimensions.”²⁶

Implications for Some Aspects of the World Politics Today

It may be still early and, in Tillich’s sense, difficult to name fascism or nationalism when we consider the world politics today. Nevertheless, we can get some theological stimulations through the lenses of Tillich’s idea of the demonic and his related religious symbols. I am here to raise several questions which are derived from this paper and by which may lead us to think further for some aspects of today’s world politics: Politicians are puzzled about the collapse of liberalism and the rise of populism, particularly in Europe. Can we have a less obscure vision by using the lens of Tillich’s idea of the demonic? The leaders of several countries with strong and peculiar images are coming onto the stage in recent years. Besides their charisma, what are the other things that are deeply grasping people? Are these things embedded with religious substances? Are they used by the leaders for political “sanctification”? How can we utter the relevant theological response? Would it be risky if we utter a theological response too easily and quickly? But then, does it mean that we have nothing to do right now? In Tillich’s term, how can “The Spiritual Community” respond to the situation of today’s world politics through the power of the Spirit? How do the “Kingdom of God” and “The Spiritual Presence” become valuable if we view the world situation today through the lens of religious symbol?

Conclusion

I first clarify the ambiguous connotation of “power” in Tillich’s writings in this paper. Then I explicate his idea of the demonic based on these different meanings of power. The nuanced relationships between *Kraft*, *Mächtigkeit* and *Macht* are also spotted. Afterward, I explain how Tillich’s idea of the demonic can act as a lens for us to theologically understand and respond to fascism. At the same time, I show how this lens has its both shortcoming and strength. I further show that why studying Tillich’s idea of the demonic should be accompanied by the study of his two religious symbols, the “Kingdom of God” and the “Spiritual Presence”. Finally, I raise some questions for the reader to further reflect on some aspects of the world politics today.

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¹ The original version of this paper is presented by the author in the “Tillich Session: Issues in Theology, Religion, and Culture Unit” in the 2017 Annual Meeting of American Academy of Religion which was held in Boston, U.S.A. This version is later edited by the author.

² Kyle Pasewark, *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 272-286.

³ Paul Tillich, “The Demonic: A Contribution to the Interpretation of History” (trans. Elsa L. Talmey) in *The Interpretation of History* (New York: Scribners, 1936), 77-122.

⁴ Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, ed. by John Dillengberger and Jane Dillengerger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 102-118.

⁵ For example, Francis Ching-Wah Yip uses Tillich’s concept of the demonic to understand the religiosity of capitalism. See Francis Ching-Wah Yip, *Capitalism as Religion? A Study of Paul Tillich’s Interpretation of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2010), 31-53.

⁶ Werner Schüssler, Dilixi: Shengming De Quanshizhe (Paul Tillich: Interpret Des Lebens) (Kaifeng: Henan University, 2011), 113.

⁷ For example, Vernon Mallow, *The Demonic: A Selected Theological Study: An Examination into the Theology of Edwin Lewis, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich* (Laham: University Press of America, 1983), 101-150; Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1976); H. Frederick Reisz, Jr., “The Demonic as a Principle in Tillich’s

Doctrine of God” in *Theonomy and Autonomy: Studies in Paul Tillich’s Engagement with Modern Culture*, ed. by John Carey (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 135-156.

⁸ Paul Tillich, *Advanced Problem of Systematic Theology: Courses at Union Theological Seminary*, New York, 1936-1938, ed. by Sturm, Erdmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 253. and “The Demonic” in *The Interpretation of History* (C. Scribner’s sons, 1936)

⁹ Paul Tillich, “The Demonic in Art” in *On Art and Architecture*, ed. by John Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: First HarperOne, 2009), 1-4.

¹² Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 75.

¹³ Paul Tillich, trans. by Franklin Sherman, *The Socialist Decision*, reprint ed. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 13-26.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 108f.

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: First HarperOne, 2009), 47-48.

¹⁷ Tillich differentiates two elements of the religious symbol. They are “element of ultimacy, which is a matter of immediate experience and not symbol itself, and the element of concreteness, which is taken from our ordinary experience and symbolically applied to God.” Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: First HarperOne, 2009), 53.

¹⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), 103.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 358.

²⁰ Paul Tillich, *Main Works/Hauptwerke, volume III: Writings in Social Philosophy and Ethics*, ed. by Erdmann Sturm, (New York: de Gruyter; Berlin: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1998), 433

²¹ Paul Tillich, *Advanced Problem of Systematic Theology: Courses at Union Theological Seminary*, New York, 1936-1938, ed. by Sturm, Erdmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 271

²² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), 245.

²³ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁴ Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 58.

²⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), 129-138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

TILlich ON THE DYNAMICS OF THE DIVINE LIFE: EVASIVE OR EARNEST

MARC A. PUGLIESE

Introduction

A *prima facie* ambiguity exists in Tillich’s language of the dynamics of the Divine Life vis-à-vis his statements on the symbolic nature of religious assertions. This raises questions about Tillich’s earnestness and leads to the practically deleterious conclusion that the world does not ultimately matter for God. Is Tillich’s language of the dynamics of the divine life earnest? Does the world really matter for God in Tillich’s theology? The diametrically opposed answers to these questions at once constitute a dialectic of negation and affirmation fitting to their subject and leave one with the impression that no satisfying answer is possible.

Tillich and Process Thought

One way to approach these questions is through the lens of the encounter between Tillich and process-relational thinkers. This encounter is nothing new, as pioneers of process-relational theology engaged Tillich¹ while Tillich engaged them, and this interaction has perdured.² Although the strands of mutual critique are more pronounced than those of agreement, the number of similarities identified is neither small nor insignificant.

This comes to the fore in comparing Whitehead and Tillich.³ Just a few examples include how both insist that we speak of “becoming” when we speak of “being”⁴ and take seriously the creative process by which things come to be (1.200). Both eschew classical “essentialist” ontology while affirming an ontology of actuality where all existence refers to a free decision (3.398),⁵ and where “aims” make being ineluctably telic (1.263–64). They both oppose the subject–object dichotomy and reject mind–matter dualism (1.261, 277–78, 281; 3.12, 14,

21-22, 26, 28, 113-14, 408, 412-13, 417). The polarities of Tillich's ontological elements—individuation and participation, dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny—have their corollaries in Whitehead, while analogues to Whitehead's doctrines of panexperientialism and internal relations can be found in Tillich (3.409).

Both critique classical theism—including God as *actus purus*—and set forth what they judge to be a more philosophically and religiously adequate view of God.⁶ Both aver that God and creatures transcend each other in mutual freedom (1.158, 1.263).⁷ Likewise, both see God as driving every creature toward individual fulfilment through a sort of “lure” in a value-creating process (1.9, 264, 267, 283, 3.422). Tillich's *Logos*, in which the universe of essence is given “the ‘immanence of creative potentiality’ in the divine ground of Being” (3.421-22) can be compared to Whiteheadian envisagement of eternal objects in God's primordial nature, just as the Whiteheadian consequent nature of God can be compared to Tillich on essentialization, or the “elevation of the temporal into the eternal” (3.396-98).⁸

Ambiguity

Tillich's apparently conflicting statements on God do raise doubts, though. On the one hand, he says much about the dynamics of the “Divine Life,” which entails life's “reunion of otherness with identity in an eternal ‘process’” (3.284; cf. 1.270, 3.420).⁹ The polar opposites of the ontological elements—like dynamics and form—are predicated of God (1.156-57, 1.179-80, 1.226; 1.231, 1.245-46),¹⁰ which makes God a “living God.” God includes temporality and relation to the modes of time (1.274, 3:418; cf. 1.257, 3.314), has an “outgoing character,” “participates in history,” “has community with” everything that is and “shares its destiny (1.245-46). He says the “world process means something for God” (3.422), the temporal becomes “eternal memory” in a “continual process” (3.399), and “life in creation contributes in every moment to the Kingdom of God and its eternal life” (3.398). Tillich even says God participates “in the negativities of existence” (1.270) and “takes the suffering of the world upon himself” (2.175).

On the other hand, he states that God is being-itself (1.235, 1.262, 1.272-73), not *a* being or entity,

and therefore not subject to the ontological structures (1.235, 1.238-39). The categories of being apply to God symbolically, not literally (1.247, 3.314-15),¹¹ and God in no way depends on any finite being (1.248).¹² Hence, God is not related to the world, does not experience change, and is subjected to neither temporal process nor the structure of finitude (1.238-239, 1.244, 1.271-72; 2.77; 3.404, 3.420).

Criticisms of Tillich by Process Thinkers

These affirmations and denials have led to divergent assessments of Tillich's doctrine of God. Some appeal to the former as evidence of real similarities between Tillich and process-relational thought.¹³ Others point to Tillich's caveats, qualifications, and talk of symbolic language as evidence that the negations at last win the day so that Tillich is not earnest in speaking of the dynamics of the life to God and God's relationship to the world.¹⁴

For example, Hartshorne lauds what he sees as similarities between Tillich and process-relational theology,¹⁵ acclaiming Tillich as a dipolar theist and panentheist. But he immediately goes on to say, “[t]his interpretation is not without its difficulties.”¹⁶ Many of Hartshorne's difficulties revolve around language. He states:

It seems Tillich must be with us in all this, but his language keeps making concessions to those who are not with us. He allows all sorts of dipolar terms, but denies that they mean what they say¹⁷

Sometimes Hartshorne is reserved, saying Tillich is not always “quite as clear and coherent as one could wish.”¹⁸ At other times he calls Tillich's thinking irrational, incoherent, and in “pure defiance of logic.”¹⁹ Even “being-itself” is an “illogical thing,”²⁰ for Hartshorne.

Similarly, Schubert Ogden says that Tillich's restriction of literal assertions about God to statements like “God is being-itself” means that, for Tillich, God is literally nonrelative and changeless.²¹ According to Ogden, Tillich still really assumes with classical theism that the “fundamental concept in terms of which God must be conceived is that of absolute, unchanging, ‘being’.”²²

Tillich on Symbols and Symbolic Language

Is Tillich incoherent? Is his talk of the dynamics of the divine life ultimately empty? Is he essentially a classical theist? In seeking answers, we must first attend more carefully to what Tillich really means by symbolic assertions. Despite his concern with semantic rationality (1.55) and verbal exactitude, this is not necessarily immediately clear. In a special edition of the *Journal of Religion* dedicated to Tillich and published at the end of his life,²³ Tillich admits that at times for the sake of abbreviation and emphasis he blurred what he holds to be the sharp distinctions between “religious,” “ontological,” and “theological” assertions.²⁴ Accordingly, he is grateful for and readily accepts Robert Scharlemann’s formulation that: “Religious assertions are symbolic (referring to the depth of being), ontological assertions are literal (referring to the structure of being), and theological assertions are literal descriptions of the correlation between the religious symbols and the ontological²⁵ concepts.”²⁶

Tillich’s theory of religious symbols and his understanding of symbolic language are interconnected (2.10). This is seen in how he uses similar terms to describe both. This also means that what he says about one has implications for the other.

Tillich’s thinking on religious symbolism underwent development and employs multiple theories. In his response to Lewis Ford in the same special edition noted above, Tillich agrees with Ford’s identification of three general theories of religious symbolism in his works: (1) the dialectic of negation and affirmation; (2) the use of the metaphor of “transparency”; and, (3) the theory of symbolic participation. With Ford, Tillich judges the theory of affirmation and negation to be fundamental and the other two are auxiliary.²⁷ Each, however, reveals important points about the reality of what is conveyed in symbolic assertions.

The dialectic of negation and affirmation means that “Every religious symbol negates itself in its literal meaning, but affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning” (2.9). This dialectic with entitative religious symbols has implications for symbolic language. Hence, Tillich also says that in any concrete symbolic assertion about God the segment of finite reality being used is negated and affirmed at the same time (1.239). Regarding the categories and ontological elements like dynamics

and form, specifically, he says: “On the creaturely level, ontological elements and categories are applicable in a proper and literal sense. On the level of God’s relation to the creature, the categories are affirmed and negated at the same time” (1.286).

In his reply to Hartshorne, Tillich explains that because God is being-itself, the essential structure of being must be rooted in God and the categories are perfectly actualized in God. However, this perfect actualization is at the same time their negation as polar or qualitatively distinct categories.²⁸ The “way of eminence” (*via eminentiae*) must be balanced with the “way of negation” (*via negationis*), and the unity of both is the “symbolic way” (*via symbolica*). He uses the example that if we say God has personality in an eminent or absolutely perfect way we must immediately add that this very assertion implies the negation of personality in the sense of “being a person.” Both statements *together* affirm the symbolic character of the attribute “personal” for God. Similarly, in speaking of the presence of time and change in the eternal unity of the Divine Life, he states: “[W]e need two polar assertions above which lies the truth, which, however, we are unable to express positively and directly” (3.418).

Using Robert Scharlemann’s careful distinctions, we may say that as theology describes the correlation between the ontological elements and categories on the one hand and the religious symbol “God” on the other, the literal assertions about the structure of (categorical) being made in the categories and elements are negated, giving way to existential affirmation that cannot be expressed directly and properly, that is, non-symbolically.²⁹

Another example is how Tillich notes that “predestination” involves the category of causality and the ontological elements of freedom and destiny. These literal meanings are negated but their symbolic sense points to the “existential experience that, in relation to God, God’s act always precedes and further, that, in order to be certain of one’s fulfillment one can and must look to God’s activity alone” (1.286). Here, as theology deals with its object of what concerns us ultimately—that which is a matter of being or not-being for us (1.12, 1.14)—the ontological elements and categories or “forms of finitude”—space and time, causality and substance—become symbols expressing the existential

question implied in finite being, the question of being-itself embracing and conquering nonbeing (1.209).

Similarly, in treating the symbol of divine omnipotence, Tillich distinguishes between the “religious meaning” of omnipotence and expressing this “theologically.” The “religious meaning” of omnipotence is the expression of the Christian consciousness that the anxiety of nonbeing is eternally overcome in the divine life, which is the first and basic answer to the question implied in finitude.” In correlating this religious symbol to the literal ontological concepts, the “theological expression” of omnipotence negates the concept of the ability to do “whatever one wants,” because this makes God a being alongside of others who asks about numerous possibilities to actualize. This subjects God to the potentiality–actuality split, which is the “heritage of finitude.” Rather, in theological expression omnipotence means the power of being that resists nonbeing in all its expressions and which is manifest in the creative process in all its forms” (1.273).³⁰

Correspondingly, the dialectic of negation and affirmation is also bound up with the existential transcendence of the subject-object bifurcation. Thus, if we speak of God as (externally) related to creatures this statement is symbolic. Every affirmation whereby God becomes an object to a subject, in knowledge or in action, must be affirmed and denied at the same time. It must be affirmed because human beings are centered selves to whom every relation involves an object. However, it must be denied because God can never become an object of knowledge or action (1.271).³¹

Before leaving negation and affirmation, we note the important point that Tillich speaks of a *correlation* between religious symbols and the ontological concepts. At one point he describes this *correlation* as akin to the correspondence of different series of data in statistical charts (1.60). Such a correspondence involves a real relationship.

Although ancillary compared to negation and affirmation, the metaphor of transparency for symbolism and the theory of symbolic participation also bear upon how symbolic statements about God are not vacant but rather point to something real.

In his exchange with Ford, Tillich says he would replace the metaphor of “transparency”

with that of “translucence” because “transparency” negates the symbolic medium too completely. Using the image of a stained-glass window, Tillich says the metaphor of “translucence” points to how the symbolic medium is not utterly passive but does contribute something of its own.³²

Symbolic participation means the symbol “participates in” the symbolized reality that it “opens” (1.177, 1.239, 2.9).³³ Here, too, the symbol plays an active role as it “opens up levels of being and meaning” otherwise closed.³⁴ Tillich clearly states that symbolic participation is possible only if there is at least some point of identity.³⁵ The “direct, immediate, non-symbolic nature” of symbols must have an original affinity with the symbolic content that they represent.³⁶

Being-Itself

Thus, a closer examination of Tillich’s various descriptions of religious symbols and symbolic statements, along with specific examples, reveals that symbolic statements about God do point to something real, for Tillich.

What about Tillich’s claim that the statement “God is being-itself (*Überseiende*, or *esse ipsum* [1.230])” is non-symbolic (1.238)? Does this indicate God is “literally” nonrelative, changeless, and absolute? Does it include fundamentally classical theistic conceptions? Here, misunderstanding what he means by “being-itself” and reading more into this term than Tillich intends leads to confusion and unjustified criticism.

Tillich expresses suspicion that much criticism of the *completely abstract*³⁷ statement “God is being-itself” results from confusing being in the *absolute sense* of the negation of non-being with a *particular element* of being like the stasis as opposed to change, or the objective as opposed to the subjective. He expressly says that he means being in this absolute sense of “not-not-being,” not a particular element of being,³⁸ but his critics conflate the two.

This absolute sense of “being-itself” simply means the “absolutely first” and underivable fact that there is something rather than nothing. This is the *Urtatsache*—the “original fact.” The “power” of being-itself means only one thing: “the degree to which a reality is able to conquer non-being.”³⁹ Everything—flux as well as stasis, dynamics as well as form, subjectivity as well as objectivity—is implied

in “being” in this sense of absolute prius.⁴⁰ Those who have experienced the “shock of non-being” cannot make any concession on this point about the ultimacy of being.⁴¹

Referring once again to Scharlemann’s distinctions, the statement “God is being-itself” is a *theological assertion* describing the correlation between the religious symbol “God” and the ontological concept expressing the “original” and inscrutable⁴² fact that there is something rather than nothing. The religious symbol “God” here conveys our concrete ultimate concern as a matter of being or not-being for us while “being-itself” is an ontological concept conveying the literal distinction beings and the power of Being or simply what it means to be (i.e., Heidegger’s “ontological difference” between *Seiendes und Sein*⁴³). This is why the theological assertion “God is being-itself” is synthetic, not analytic or tautologous.

And Tillich explains that this is only the first, not the last, theological assertion. It merely answers the question: “What does it mean that God ‘is’?”⁴⁴ and the answer simply is: “God is not *a* being.”⁴⁵ He says he has much more to say about God beyond this,⁴⁶ mentioning his longer explications of God as “Life,” God as “Spirit,” and God as related.⁴⁷

What of the *non-symbolic* nature of this assertion? In his exchange with Hartshorne, Tillich harkens back to an earlier interaction with William Urban and Edwin Aubrey in which he realized we must delimit the symbolic realm with a non-symbolic statement because not doing so would be self-referential and self-defeating. This is because if there are absolutely no non-symbolic statements then even claims about how symbols apply to God are themselves symbolic and we fall into a circular argument.⁴⁸ Symbolic statements thus assume some basis of non-symbolic knowledge.⁴⁹ For this reason, all necessarily symbolic assertions about God can be made only on the basis of this first non-symbolic assertion about God that God is being-itself (1.239),⁵⁰ after which nothing else can be said about God as God that is not symbolic (1.239).⁵¹

Symbolic Language & Sincerity

We have seen that Tillich’s repeated declarations of a real correlation between symbolic assertions and the object of ultimate concern mean he is earnest in what he says symbolically about the

dynamics of the divine life. Nor can his sincerity be gainsaid on the basis of his non-symbolic assertion that “God is ‘being-itself.’”

Many other scattered statements “point to” the veracity here. He states that “the immediate reality used in the symbol has something to do with the transcendent reality which is symbolized in it.”⁵² He says when we approach God cognitively through the structural elements of being-itself that make God a “living God,” these “enable us to use symbols which we are certain point to the ground of reality” (1.238). Similarly: “If we use the symbol ‘divine life,’ as we certainly must, we imply that there is an analogy between the basic structure of experienced life and the Ground of Being in which life is rooted” (1.156). As early as 1928 he rejected what he calls “negative theories” of symbolism because they deny a symbol has an objective referent, giving it purely subjective significance.⁵³

Although he rejects the literal application to God of the dynamics side of the dynamics-form pair of ontological elements because this makes God finite and dependent (1.246), Tillich insists these concepts not be abandoned because they point symbolically to a quality of the divine life that is analogous to what appears in the ontological structure. Statements about divine creativity, God’s participation in history, God’s outgoing character, and so forth, are based on this dynamic element (1.246).⁵⁴

The problems with a non-symbolic doctrine of God as “becoming” is not becoming per se. It is that the literal sense of “becoming” implies finitude (1.246–47), and that becoming as well as rest, dynamics as well as form, imply being in the sense of what Tillich means by “being-itself,” as explained above. Tillich affirms that the symbolic application of the dynamics-form polarity to the divine life does express the union of possibility with fulfillment, real potentiality with real actuality, God going out from God’s self and returning without ceasing to be God in an eternal rest (1.247): “If we call God the ‘living God,’ we deny that he is a pure identity of being as being; and 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” (1.242).

Eschatology and Essentialization

Tillich's symbolic statements about the dynamics of the divine life also directly bear on what he says about how the world really does matter to God. Perhaps the most puissant affirmations that the world matters to God for Tillich lie in his eschatology. Using what he calls a "bold metaphor," he states that in a continuous process the temporal becomes "eternal memory" (3.399). "Time not only mirrors eternity; it contributes to Eternal Life in each of its moments" (3.420). Eternity permanently elevates the finite into itself (3.399) so that what is positive in the universe becomes an object of eternal memory (3.400). In this way finitude "does not cease to be finitude, but it is 'taken into' the infinite, the eternal" (3.411). "Nothing with being is ultimately annihilated. Nothing with Being is excluded from eternity" (3.399).

This concerns not only created essences apart from existence. Utilizing Schelling's notion of "essentialization" as a "conceptual symbol" (3.407), Tillich affirms that "the new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created in existence, thus producing the ultimately new" (3.400–1). This participation in "eternal life" "depends on a creative synthesis of a being's essential nature with what it has made of it in its temporal existence (3.401). Although metaphorically and inadequately expressed, this "gives an infinite weight to every decision and creation in time and space" (3.401). Tillich maintains:

What happens in time and space, in the smallest particle of matter as well as in the greatest personality, is significant for eternal life. And since eternal life is participation in the divine life, every finite happening is significant for God (3.398) . . .

¹ See, for example, Bernard Loomer, "Tillich's Theology of Correlation," *Journal of Religion* 36 (1956) 150–56; Charles Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Kegley and Bretall, 164–95 (New York: Macmillan, 1961); idem, "Tillich and the Other Great Tradition," *Anglican Theological Review* 43 (1961) 245–59; idem, "Tillich and the Nontheological Meanings of Theological Terms," *Religion in Life* 35 (1966) 674–85; idem, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967) 33–37; Schubert M. Ogden, "Beyond Supernaturalism," *Religion in Life* 33 (1963–64): 7–18; and idem, *The Reality of*

the world process means something for God (3.422).

This similarity here to Whitehead's consequent nature of God is perhaps one of the most conspicuous similarities between Tillich and Whitehead, and in language that sounds unmistakably Whiteheadian, Tillich says more about this "cannot be said—except in poetic imagery" (3.399).⁵⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, disambiguation of the *prima facie* ambiguity in Tillich's language of the dynamics of the Divine Life vis-à-vis his claims about the symbolic nature of these assertions is indeed possible. Tillich laments how many get hung up on his first statement regarding God as "being-itself" that they stop reading everything else he has to say about God, and base their criticisms on that small section.⁵⁶ Reading well beyond this propaedeutic and allowing Tillich himself to determine what he means reveals that Tillich's distinctions between symbolic and literal language cannot be pressed into service to question the sincerity of his talk of the dynamics of the Divine Life and how the world matters for God. A careful examination of Tillich's vivid descriptions of the dynamics of the Divine Life in relation to the world reveal an intention to affirm something real about God, which his qualifications about symbolic language are not designed to obviate. Tillich is earnest. For Tillich, the world does "really matter" for God in the robust sense that Tillich's critics deny him. If we leave it to Tillich himself to determine what he means then we must conclude that, far from being disingenuous, Tillich quite really and quite "literally" means what he says.

God and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 44–54.

² See, for instance, Donald R. Weisbaker, "Process Thought in Tillich's Eschatology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5(2) (Summer 1974): 91–107; and Tyron Inbody, "Paul Tillich and Process Theology," *Theological Studies* 36(3) (1975): 472–92.

³ In seeking reasons for these similarities, one may perhaps point to relatively proximate shared origins in two trajectories of German Idealism: Schelling in Tillich's case and Anglo-American Absolute Idealism (a

la F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, etc.) in Whitehead's case. On Schelling and Tillich see, for example, See, John W. Rathbun and Fred Burwick, "Paul Tillich and the Philosophy of Schelling," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 3 (September 1964): 373–93. On Hegel, Absolute Idealism, and Whitehead, see, Robert Ellis, "From Hegel to Whitehead," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (October 1981): 403–21. At the beginning of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead relates: "Finally, though throughout the main body of the work I am in sharp disagreement with Bradley, the final outcome is after all not so greatly different. . . . Indeed, if this cosmology be deemed successful, it becomes natural at this point to ask whether the type of thought involved be not a transformation of some main doctrines of Absolute Idealism onto a realistic basis" (Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne [New York: Macmillan, 1929; corr. ed., New York: Free Press, 1978]), 90–91 [henceforth "PR"]).

⁴ "The dynamic character of being implies the tendency of everything to transcend itself and to create new forms. At the same time everything tends to conserve its own form as the basis of its self-transcendence. It tends to unite identity and difference, rest and movement, conservation and change. Therefore it is impossible to speak of being without also speaking of becoming. Becoming is just as genuine in the structure of being as is what remains unchanged in the process of becoming. And vice versa, becoming would be impossible if nothing were preserved in it as the measure of change. A process philosophy which sacrifices the persisting identity of that which is in process sacrifices the process itself, its continuity, the relation of what is conditioned to its conditions, the inner aim (telos) which makes a process a whole. Bergson was right when he combined the *elan vital*, the universal tendency toward self-transcendence, with duration, with continuity, and self-conservation in the temporal flux" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–63], 1.181). Due to their frequency, all subsequent references will be by volume and page number, e.g., "(1.181)." Cf. Paul Tillich, "On God and His Attributes," 376.

⁵ Tillich and Whitehead both explicitly appeal to the etymology of the word "decision" to make the point that decision means the "cutting off" of possibilities (1.152, 1.184n4; cf. 3.220, 398).

⁶ Tillich writes: "Pure actuality...is not alive. Life includes the separation of potentiality and actuality. The nature of life is actualization, not actuality. The God who is *actus purus* is not the living God" (1.246).

⁷ Hartshorne calls this a "virtually exact parallel to Whitehead" (Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," 166).

⁸ Hartshorne comments that "impressive treatment of immortality is probably not far" from the process-relational view of our objective immortality in God (but here Hartshorne distinguishes between "everlasting" and "eternal" (Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," 174).

⁹ On the basis of the dynamic ontological element, Tillich predicates to God the dialectics of life, which involve the movement of separation and union. "If we call God the 'living God,' we deny that he is a pure identity of being as being; and 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" (1.242). According to Tillich, the three functions of life are: (1) self-integration; (2) self-creation; (3) Self-transcending to God, (3.30–32; cf. 3.96). Thus, for Tillich, God has the character of all life in that God goes beyond God's self and returns to God's self (2.90). In a way analogous to the Neoplatonic *exitus–reditus*, there is a separation and return to the divine self (1.56), and this depends on the dynamic element: "The divine creativity, God's participation in history, his outgoing character, are based on this dynamic element" (1.246).

¹⁰ Hartshorne stated that Tillich comes closest to the dipolar conception of God when Tillich affirms that "in God the polarities are present but without 'tension' or possible 'dissolution'" (Charles Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," 186). The difference is that for creatures, the tension in the polarities of the ontological elements (e.g., 1.199–200) leaves finite being open to the thread of nonbeing through dissolution (1.198). "Within the divine life, every ontological element includes its polar element completely, without tension and without the threat of dissolution for God is being-itself" (1.241–43 somewhere in there).

¹¹ "There can be no doubt that any concrete assertion about God must be symbolic, for a concrete assertion is one which uses a segment of finite experience in order to say something about him" (1.239).

¹² This is because "[a] conditioned God is no God" (1.248).

¹³ See, for instance: Donald R. Weisbaker, "Process Thought in Tillich's Eschatology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5(2) (Summer 1974): 91–107; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 130; and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 132.

Weisbaker says that Tillich's caveat about symbolic language is "not-too-convincing" (Weisbaker, 100).

¹⁴ See, for example, Ogden, 55, 158; John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1976). 51; John B., Cobb, Jr., *Living Options in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 281; John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed., Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger, 59–100 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 92–93; Thomas J. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 95.

¹⁵ Hartshorne points to, among other things, how Tillich correctly says that theology today must deal with the controversy between classical theism in which becoming is an inferior order of reality, and the philosophers and theologians of process who say that being, so far as other than becoming, is a function, aspect or constituent of the becoming or process that "is reality itself" (Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," 168). As did the great modern process philosophers (e.g., Whitehead, Fechner, Berdyaev), Tillich tries to do justice to both sides of this controversy (168). Tillich's remark that what is positive in time is in God implies that creation, as an ever new synthesis embracing all that is not new, is in God and the "data" of each synthesis includes whatever is not new through the divine counterpart of memory, which Tillich allows symbolically (173). Hartshorne points to where Tillich says something like the process claim that "each actual synthesis is a 'potential' for further syntheses" (178). As has already mentioned above, Hartshorne says that "[t]he closest Tillich comes, perhaps, to dipolarity is in his doctrine that in God the polarities are present but without 'tension' or possible 'dissolution'" (Hartshorne 186). In what he calls a "virtually exact parallel with Whitehead," Tillich affirms, with Whitehead, that God and creatures by their freedom mutually 'transcend' each other (166), and that all creatures, not just humans, have spontaneity and freedom (166, 184) so that there is no divine determinism (176). For Hartshorne, Tillich's "impressive treatment of immortality is probably not far" from the process-relational view of our objective immortality in God (but here Hartshorne distinguishes between "everlasting" and "eternal" (174).

¹⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹⁷ Ibid., 177. Inbody makes a similar point: "So near and yet so far. Tillich has conceded to his process critics almost everything that possibly could be con-

ceded without capitulating to their revisions of classical theism. Yet in the end his insistence on the priority of being-itself and his refusal to make any literal statements about God put him in the camp of the classical theists; indeed, his 'God beyond God' makes him a defender of one of the most extreme forms of the transcendence of God in terms of His aseity that classical theism has ever had" (Inbody, 484).

¹⁸ Ibid., 195.

¹⁹ Ibid., 177. Tillich's affirmation and negation of the categories when applied to God is a similarly "logic-defying phrase" (ibid., 195).

²⁰ Ibid., 177. Joining a host of others—and not surprisingly for Hartshorne himself—he criticizes Tillich's denial of literal assertions about God except for the statement that "God is being-itself" and goes on to reason that it impossible to give a justification of the doctrine of nonliteral, symbolic language without arguments that themselves can be taken literally and as such are cogent (ibid., 195). Others have argued that it is impossible to avoid other non-symbolic, literal, assertions about God. For instance, couching the discussion in terms univocal, analogical, and equivocal predication, Robert Neville argues that to say: "all knowledge of God is symbolic" is to admit some univocal (i.e., literal) ground for denying univocity (Robert Cummings Neville, *God the Creator* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992], 147). This literal ground is Tillich's ontology in which God is being-itself or the power of being transcending and grounding all determinate structures of finite being. This ontology of being-itself grounds the claim that all other knowledge of God is symbolic and is therefore not itself symbolic. This is problematic because if God does transcend all determinate structures then the ontology cannot be literal and really express God's transcendence (ibid.).

²¹ Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays*, 55.

²² Ibid.

²³ Tillich notes that the publication of this supplement took place in the time between the end of his teaching at Chicago and his eightieth birthday (Paul Tillich, "Rejoinder," *The Journal of Religion* 16[1] [January 1966]: 184).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ontology discovers concepts that are less universal than being, but more universal than any concept dealing with the ontic (in Heidegger's terminology) realm of beings (*Seiendes*). These concepts constitute what Tillich calls the "structure of being," which provides what is needed to represent symbolically both the nature of the divine life (by the ontological elements) (1.243; cf. 1.238) and the relation of God to the creature (by the ontological categories) (1.237).

Ontology can state the conceptual truth of God's nature clearly because God is "the ground of the structure of beings" and God "is this structure" (1.238–39). On the one hand, as the Ground of being God is the ground of the structure of being and therefore is not subject to that structure. On the other hand, we are inescapably bound to the categories of finitude (1.237) and so can only approach God cognitively and speak of God through the structural elements of being. The ontological categories and elements apply in a proper and literal sense to creatures and symbolically to God (1.286). Tillich says that the categorical forms appear implicitly or explicitly in every thought, including about God" (1.192). With Kant, Tillich maintains there is no knowledge whatsoever without the categories. We also note here how Tillich equates ontology with metaphysics, but opts to use "ontology" because metaphysics has developed connotations divergent from its original meaning (1.20).

²⁶ Ibid. We note here how religious assertions are nonliteral and symbolic, philosophical assertions are literal and non-symbolic, and theological assertions combine the literal and the symbolic. Theology is symbolic because it articulates the meaning of religious symbols.

²⁷ Ibid., 186.

²⁸ He adds "In this sense the classical doctrine that the divine attributes are identical in God is correct" (Paul Tillich, "Answer," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, 329–49 [New York: Macmillan, 1961], 334).

²⁹ When he says the statement "God is 'being-itself'" is a non-symbolic statement he adds that this means "It does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly" (1.238).

³⁰ The non-objectifiable nature of ultimate concern is related to how religious symbols attempt to express existential experience. Existential awareness is not a rational, objective, knowledge of a being alongside of other beings about which there could objective discussion by a detached subject. Again, religion deals existentially with being while philosophy deals theoretically with the structure of being (1.230). Religious knowledge requires maximum participation. "Participation" here is not intellectual reflection but rather existential engagement, living interaction. Our ultimate concern "cannot be discovered by detached observation or by conclusions derived from such observation. It can be found only in acts of surrender and participation" (1.44). Religious language does not enable us to "gain knowledge of God by drawing conclusions about the infinite from the finite" but conveys the meaning of existential participation in God (1.238–40)

³¹ Tillich says that God always remains a subject (1.271). German Idealism's Absolute Subject that is

never object has had far-reaching impact on continental theology—Barth and Tillich both hold this tenet.

³² Tillich, "Rejoinder" 187.

³³ Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson, 107–16 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1955), 109.

³⁴ Paul Tillich, "The Word of God," in *Language: An Enquiry Into Its Meanings and Function*, ed. Ruth Nands Anshen, 122–33 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), 132; and idem, "Theology and Symbolism," 109. Religious symbols point to ultimate reality, the "ground of being," which is not a level but the creative ground of all levels. Discursive language cannot open up ultimate reality, the level of the holy, the ground of the soul in which the holy is experienced (Tillich, "The Word of God," 133).

³⁵ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 188.

³⁶ Paul Tillich, "Symbol and Knowledge: A Response," *Journal of Liberal Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Spring 1941): 204.

³⁷ Every concrete assertion about God must be symbolic, because a concrete assertion uses a segment of finite experience to say something about God (1.239). The statement: "God is being-itself (*Überseiende*, or *esse ipsum* [1.230])" is non-symbolic (1.238) but this is the most abstract statement about God. This is because theology must begin its task by making explicit the foundation implicit in every religious thought and expression concerning God, and therefore its first statement is the most abstract and unsymbolic statement possible (1.239; cf. 1.294). In the statement "God is being-itself," "God" is the referent of concrete existential ultimate concern being explicated, and "being-itself" is a concept. This is why the statement "God is being-itself" is synthetic, not analytic or tautologous.

³⁸ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 185.

³⁹ Ibid., 188.

⁴⁰ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 185. Being in this sense is also implied by and therefore prior to becoming, which is one of Tillich's criticisms of conceiving God in terms of a literal process (ibid.).

⁴¹ Ibid., 186.

⁴² The "original fact" that "being is and nonbeing is not" precedes even reason as its "Ground and Abyss" (*Grund und Abgrund*) (1.110). It is "that beyond which thought cannot go" (1.230).

⁴³ Tillich also calls "being-itself" *Überseiende*, *esse ipsum*, and the "power of being."

⁴⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁵ "The being of God is being-itself. The being of God cannot be understood as the existence of a being alongside others or above others. If God is *a* being, he is subject to the categories of finitude, especially to space and substance" (1.235).

⁴⁶ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 184, 186. The "first (not the last!) statement about God" is "that he is being-itself or the ground of being," and "nothing can be said about God theologically before the statement is made that God is the power of being in all being" (3.294).

⁴⁷ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 186.

⁴⁸ For example, the statement that "everything we say about God is symbolic" must be non-symbolic, otherwise we fall into a circular argument (2.9). Tillich adds this in the second volume of *Systematic Theology* in response to criticisms to this effect. He says he had already realized this problem before, through his exchange with Urban and Aubrey.

⁴⁹ Tillich, "Symbol and Knowledge," 203; *Systematic Theology*, 2.9.

⁵⁰ This regards theological assertions. Religious assertions in contrast to theological assertions, however, do not require such a foundation" because "the foundation is implicit in every religious thought concerning God" (1.239).

⁵¹ In 2.9 Tillich famously says that ". . . there is a point at which a non-symbolic assertion about God must be made. There is such a point, namely the statement that everything we say about God is symbolic. Such a statement is an assertion about God which itself is not symbolic. Otherwise we would fall into a circular argument" (2.9). In neither 1.238 nor 2.9 does he explicitly say that what he sets forth as a non-symbolic statement is the *only* non-symbolic statement. Whether the latter is implied is another question. 2.9 may very well be one of Tillich's many responses to criticisms of the first volume of *Systematic Theology* contained in the second volume.

⁵² Tillich, "Symbol and Knowledge, 203.

⁵³ Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," *The Journal of Liberal Religion*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 1940): 16. The original version of this essay first appeared in a 1928 issue of *Blätter für Deutsche Philosophie. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Philosophischen Gesellschaft*. "Negative theories" of symbolism are especially dangerous for religious symbols because religious symbols do not refer to a world of objects but they do intend to express a reality beyond the subjectivity of the religious person (*ibid.*)

⁵⁴ He explicates this with the example of temporality: "It includes a 'not yet' which is, however, always balanced by an 'already' within the divine life. It is not an absolute 'not yet,' which would make it a divine-demonic power, nor is the 'already' an absolute already. It also can be expressed as the negative in the process of being-itself. As such it is the basis of the negative element in the creature in which it is not overcome but is effective and a potential disruption" (1.246–47).

⁵⁵ If Whitehead is correct about how when attempting to formulate metaphysical first principles language is deficient and words remain "metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap" (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 4), if he is right that philosophy is "the endeavor to find a conventional phraseology for the vivid suggestiveness of a poet" akin to seeking "to reduce Milton's 'Lycidas' to prose" (Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* [New York: Capricorn, 1958], 68–69), then Tillich's distinctions between symbolic and literal language cannot be pressed into service to attenuate his dynamic language about God and how the world matters for God, let alone dismiss it out of hand.

⁵⁶ Tillich, "Rejoinder," 186.

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