ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

# God is Being-Itself: Exploring Tillich's Concept of the Ultimate

# Dr. T. Jamedi Longkumer

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Dimapur Government College, Oriental Colony, Dimapur - 797112, Nagaland, India

Abstract: This paper will probe into the philosophical locus of the concept of the ultimate concern as discussed by Paul Tillich in his substantial writings. It appears that the concept is to be situated in the problem concerning the attributes of God, in particular, God's infinitude. The idea of the infinitude puts us on guard not to predicate of God anything, including 'existence', for that would be limiting the unlimited. This is one specific problem with which philosophers have grappled with. Can we say, 'God exists?' Some say, we can, what is more, we can adduce arguments for God's existence. Others say that we cannot and they too adduce arguments for God's non-existence. Tillich belongs to the latter group, but without being an atheist. This insight of Tillich is the study-focus of this paper. Apart from the question, if existence is a predicate, his answer here has a deep significance to analytical and language philosophy. Tillich believes that the question of God can neither be asked nor answered. Hence the answer, too, be it the affirmation or the negation, implicitly negates the nature of God. Paradoxically, for Tillich, both the affirmation and negation of God constitute forms of atheism.

**Keywords:** Being-itself, Existence, Transcendence, Theism, Atheism

# 1. Introduction

For Tillich the statements, 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' mean the same thing, namely, the irrelevance of the question of God's existence. The two statements, one tends to think, constitute theism and atheism respectively. Tillich, however, argues that not only the denial of God, but also the affirmation would amount to the repudiation of the infinitude of God. The question therefore is not whether the term, 'God', refers to any reality. Rather, if the reality, to which the term refers, is like any other finite realities that we encounter. Its ultimacy refers, not to its being the first or to its being the highest, but to its being the ground or the source of all beings. Tillich, in stating that 'God does not exist', is only restricting the use of the word 'existence' to the finite world, at once safeguarding thereby God's unique nature. This is Tillich's novel way of reinstating the Scholastic thesis that one cannot say that the creator and the creature exist in the same univocal sense. This line of thought is explored in this paper and the discussion pivots around two crucial issues. Firstly, the reason why Tillich asserts that the concept of existence is incompatible with the concept of God as the ultimate concern has to be critically examined. Tillich's statement, 'God does not exist', is liable to be misunderstood in more than one way. Hence it is to be explicated with reference to the concept of infinitude, the traditional arguments for God's existence and Tillich's responses thereto and, above all the irrelevance of both atheism theism. Secondly, the philosophical foundational of Tillich's assertion 'God is Being-itself' has been closely scrutinized in the general background of the concept of an ultimate concern, which is the presupposition of all discussion on God, of approximation to ultimacy and of Tillich's agreement and disagreement with the Scholastic understanding of God's existence.

2. God's Infinitude

In Western thought the term God is usually associated with the Judaic-Christian concept of God. A basic characteristic attributed here to God is infinitude or 'illimitability'. The concept as such is negative and existence is the positive side of the same concept. The problem of God's existence, then, lies with the nature of his infinitude. The division in this matter is between those philosophers who interpret God pantheistically and those who interpret God theistically, especially of the Judeo-Christian persuasion to whom God wholly transcends the world. According to the pantheistic group of thinkers, the world, being divine, is also infinite (even if particular things and persons reflect its 'infinity' in a limited degree). Spinoza is one of the protagonists of this view, as elaborated in his work Ethics. (1985) Having posited a single substance, he affirmed that it must be infinite both in its essence and in its attributes. God must be infinite in his essence because if he were finite we could suppose the existence of something else by which he is, so that he could not now be the sole reality. His attributes must also be infinite, because if his essence is infinite, there must be an infinite number of ways in which it can be conceived. This view is in opposition to the theistic understanding which holds that the world is finite as created, and only God, as the creator, is infinite. It asserts that all perfections pre-exist in God eminently. But the mode of their existence in God is determined by the infinity, which God does not share with any creature. God's infinity, speaking negatively means 'notfinite'. In other words, God is free from the limitations which affect every other being. There are two fundamental limitations affecting the finite being in contrast to the infinity of God. First, every finite being is a mode of existence, for instance a man exists in one way and a dog in another. But, in contrast to this, God is existence per se. Second, if God is existence 'in-itself' then he must be self-existent and that he does not derive his being from any other source. Again, in contrast to this, all beings depend continuously on the creative act of God who alone is said to be. Both these aspects of the finitude of the created finite being are affirmed

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

by the Scholastics in the dictum that the existence of the finite being is limited by (or proportionate to) its finite essence. Likewise the two aspects of God's infinity are affirmed by the Scholastic dictum that in God essence and existence are identical. (Aquinas, 1952) The finitude of any being other than God consists in the lack of this identity at both points mentioned above. Its essence limits its existential act, and this limitation follows from its dependent character. It exists as 'this' or 'that' by its derivation from Being who is the necessary existence.

# 3. Arguments for God's Existence

The demonstration of the existence of the theistic God is the concern of the many arguments for the existence of God. The prominent ones in this regard are the ontological and cosmological arguments. The former argument proceeds from the 'idea of God' to its necessary existence. St. Anselm spoke of God as a being greater than which nothing else can be conceived. (1965) In other words, God is so perfect that nothing more perfect can ever be conceived. This God exists in reality because if this most perfect conceivable being existed only in the mind, we should then have the contradiction that it is possible to conceive of a yet more perfect being, namely, the same being existing in reality as well as in the mind. Anselm further goes on to argue out not merely the existence but the necessary existence of God. Since God as infinitely perfect being is not limited in or by time, the possibilities of God's having ever come to exist or ever ceasing to exist are alike excluded, and thereby God's non-existence is rendered impossible. We may note, here, that existence in this argument is taken to be a necessary quality of God and it is predicated of God. This was clearly stated by Descartes, who claimed that existence must be among the defining predicates of God as argued in Fifth Meditations (1901) and Principles of Philosophy (1984). Just as the fact, that the sum total of the internal angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, is a necessary characteristic of a triangle, so is existence a necessary characteristic of a supremely perfect being. A triangle without its defining properties would not be a triangle, even so God without existence would not be God. But the ontological argument of Anselm was not philosophically invincible. For such a proof for the existence of God, on the basis of existence as a necessary attribute or predicate, was challenged and severely exposed by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason (1990) and later by Bertrand Russell in his theory of description (1946).

The cosmological argument, on the other hand, starts from some general features of the world around us. It argues that there could not be a world with the particular characteristics that, as a matter of fact, it has, unless there was also the ultimate reality which we call God. Thomas Aquinas is the best representative of this view. He outlined three main arguments for God's existence in *De Potentia Dei* (1952). The first statement of the argument shows that, since the act of being is central to all existents, there must be one universal cause of all and this cause is God. The second argument starts from the fact that all beings in our experience are imperfect and are not the source of their

actual being. The reasoning concludes from these contingent features of the world to the existence of the most perfect, the original source, a prime-mover that moves everything but itself remaining unmoved. The third argument implies reasoning from the composite nature of finite beings to the necessary, simple or pure existence of a primary being in which essence and the act of existing are identical. In this way Aquinas thought he had successfully argued for the existence of the reality of God as the universal cause, by which all other beings are brought forth into actual being. But the problem with such a method of arguing through a conclusion is that it restricts God to the finite realm. (Tillich, 1968) It contradicts the idea of the infinite God. Every argument derives its conclusion from something that is given to something that is only sought to be proved. In the arguments for the existence of God, the world is given and God is sought. Some characteristics of the given world make the conclusion of 'God's existence' necessary. Thus, God is derived from the world. This of course does not mean is dependent on the world. However, it means that, if we derive God from the world, he cannot be that which transcends the world infinitely. It does violence to the nature of God as infinite. God is the 'world', a missing part of that, from which he is derived as a conclusion. This contradicts the idea of God, his infinitude, in particular.

### 4. Tillich's Position

When we speak of God's being Tillich observes that we have to focus on the ultimacy implicit in the concept. For Tillich, God is the ultimate concern. Ultimacy refers here to God's infinitude. The theistic philosophers thought it necessary to associate God's infinitude with God's existence. In other words, since God is infinite, since God is perfect, he must exist. This is the point of disagreement between Tillich and theistic philosophers. Tillich too holds that God is infinite, conditional and limitless. But unlike the others, it is this insistence that 'God is infinite, or unlimited', which led Tillich to assert that we should not even say that 'God exists', since this would be a limiting statement. He writes, "The 'existence of God' contradicts the idea of a creative ground of essence and existence. The ground of being cannot be found within the totality of beings, nor can the ground of essence and existence participate in the tension and disruption characteristic of the transition from essence to existence. The Scholastics were right when they asserted that in God there is no difference between essence and existence. But they perverted their insight when in spite of this assertion they spoke of the existence of God and tried to argue in favour of it. He is being-itself, beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exist is to deny him." (1968, P. 127) The phrase 'beyond essence and existence' in this context does not mean without it. God, as the ground, rather embraces both, though in an infinite way. It does however mean not being determined by it in the way in which the finite beings are determined. (Kegley and Bretall, 1952) Tillich's definition of God as 'Being-itself' means that God is not a being. Therefore, to say that 'God exists' is wrong, because only a being exists; only finite beings exists. In other words, existence is a characteristic of specific entities that can be isolated either by observation or by

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

<u>Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY</u>

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

thought. Existence is properly attributed to individual entities that are necessarily limited by others. God, who is beingitself, and not a being alongside other beings, cannot therefore be said to exist. This is precisely the reason why Tillich believes that the concept of existence is incompatible with the concept of God. The difficulty lies in that, when one uses existence with regard to God, God is being qualified in the way finite beings are. (1968, P. 127) Such a God is a being besides others, and as such becomes a part of the whole finite reality. He is of course considered as its most important part, nevertheless, a part of the created totality. He ceases to be the ground of all beings. Yet, he is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories, which constitute reality. But, then, every statement about him subjects him to them. He is seen as the 'self', who has a world, an 'environment' pitted against him, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and time distinct from eternality. Tillich's non-acceptance of God's existence is rooted in the rejection of such demeaning presupposition. (1968, P. 261)

Tillich believes that the being of God cannot be understood in terms of existence, because it would then imply a contradiction in the nature of God, namely, the distinction between God's essential and existential being. In other words, the statement, 'God exists', entails that God has an essence distinct from its act of existence. If he is existence he cannot be essence. Thus, the quality of existence, when used in reference to God, becomes a limiting concept. Essence, as used in the finite reality, denotes the potentialities of existence, and this essence also has being. This split is seen in the conflict between potentiality and actuality. Within reality there are structures, which have no existence and likewise, within reality there are things which have existence on the basis of those structures. 'Treehood', for instance, does not exist, although it has being, namely potential being. But the tree in the physical world exists. It stands out of the mere potentiality of treehood. But it stands out and exists, only because it participates in that power of being which is treehood, that power which makes every tree a tree and nothing else. Thus there is a clear differentiation between essence and existence, which are two types of being, and this structural truth characterizes everything in the finite realm. Therefore, if we say that 'God exists', we make God a being, whose existence does not fulfill his essential potentialities, being and not-yet-being are mixed in him, as they are in everything finite. God ceases to be God, as the ground of being and meaning. It was this logical fallacy in the idea of God's existence that Tillich was pointing to.

# 5. The Problem of Theism and Atheism

It can be said that, in religious terms, Tillich rejected the existence of the theistic God because it makes God a supranatural deity. Supranaturalism is something that Tillich opposed no less than naturalism. His rejection is loud and unconditional. In describing his own intellectual orientation, Tillich refers to his rejection of supranaturalism and names this attitude elsewhere as the 'self-transcending realism'. Theism makes God a transcendent object, the creation an act

at the beginning of time, the consummation a future state of things. To criticize such a conditioning of the unconditioned, even if it leads to atheistic consequences is more religious because it is more aware of the unconditional character of the divine than a theism that bans God into the supranatural realm. (1948, P. 82) Against the supranaturalism of theism which, Tillich believes, obviously conditions being-itself, he justifies atheism as the right response. When the traditional atheist says, "God does not exist", it can be a reaction against theism, against the belief in a divine being besides the other beings. In making God an object besides other objects, the existence and nature of which are matters of argument, Tillich argues that theology supports the escape to atheism. (1968, P.245) In many of his statements, Tillich seems to be suggesting that 'God does not exist' is the right answer to the question of the arguments for the existence of God. And, this is the reason why many critics have labeled him as an atheist. For anyone who closely follows the thought of Tillich, however, this accusation stands on unfounded ground. Firstly, because Tillich by taking his stand against theism does not in any way reject God. Secondly, because it is his own special way of preserving God's unique nature. When Tillich defends atheism, he is defending it against theism. It is right only in the context of the literalism of theism and its validity goes only as far as it is a refutation of unguarded theism. Tillich sides with atheism because, in comparison with theism that transforms the ultimacy of the ultimate concern to the contingency of finite being, atheism is more aware of the unconditional character of the divine. But for this, the questions of atheism are as irrelevant as those of theism.

In the context of his doctrine of God as being-itself, Tillich rejects not only theism but also atheism. The question of the existence, as well as non-existence, of God for him can neither be asked nor answered. (Tillich, 1968, P.217) If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence. Therefore the answer, whether negative or positive, implicitly denies the nature of God. It is therefore as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, and this God, for Tillich, is above existence. So both the answers, 'God exists' and 'God does not exist', deny God by denying the nature of God. The unwanted consequences of the theistic assertion are already indicated. Theism, by attributing existence to God, brings him down to the level of a being: John exists, the Himalaya exists, the Outab Minar exists, so too, God exists. This is because only a finite being can exist. In this way theism, in affirming God, denies the nature of God as being-itself. This denial is clear and straightforward. But how do we understand the atheistic denial, 'God does not exist'? The atheistic denial is straightforwardly absurd. Let us replace the word 'God' in the statement, 'God does not exist', with 'being-itself'. The resultant statement would read now as, 'being-itself does not exist'. The God, of whom the predicate, 'does not exist', is stated, is being-itself, the God who is said to be beyond existence. Atheism, it may be pointed out, talks of God in terms of negation of something, a something which is not God's nature. To put it differently, atheism denies the existence about God, which is, in the first place, not a quality of (or attribute or related to) God at all, as of things in the finite realm. That is, existence is denied of

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

God, when it does not concern God at all. To understand the manifest absurdity of the position of atheistic denial, let us consider the statement, 'Man does not have wings'. In the statement 'wings' are denied of man, but, then, wings are not ever a part of man's nature, his physical make-up. So, this statement denies the nature of man, because it presupposes (or rather is based on the ground) that 'Man has wings'. In much the same way, the atheistic denial talks of God in terms of his existence, (though the negation of it), thus denying the nature of God.

# 6. God's Being: The Presupposition of Existence

After removing the tag of existence from God, Tillich thinks it is possible to properly understand the meaning and the nature of God – God is the answer to the question implied in man's infinitude. God is the answer to the question about the being and meaning of human life. The metaphysical question has now descended to human ontology, therefore to religion. Correspondingly, the debates of the classical philosophers will have to be revisited with a new perspective. Tillich opines that the so-called arguments for the existence of God should be looked at from an altogether different perspective. Even though he denies their validity as arguments, he accepts them as expressions of the human situation, or predicament, from which the question of God arises. They are valid in so far as they present an analysis of reality, which indicates that the question of God is unavoidable. They are however, wrong, in so far as they claim that the existence of a high being is the logical conclusion of their analysis. He states, "The arguments for the existence of God are neither the arguments nor the proofs of the existence of God. They are expressions of the 'question' of God which is implied in human finitude. The question is their truth; every answer they give is untrue...It must deprive them of their argumentative character, and it must eliminate the combination of the words 'existence' and 'God'. If this is accomplished, natural theology becomes the elaboration of the question of God, it ceases to be the answer to this question...the arguments for the existence of God analysis of the human situation in such a way that the question of God appears possible and necessary." (Tillich, 1968, P.228)

From the above statements we can note two points. Firstly, the question of God is a necessary and legitimate question. Secondly, this question is not, and should not be taken as the question about the existence of God. The reason why Tillich considers this question as necessary is clearly on account of the ontology he elaborates. The question is the result of the way man is, and he cannot be otherwise. We must not miss here the features of human ontology subscribed to by Tillich. The distinctive way that man is includes an immediate awareness of God. Tillich writes, "The question of God is possible because an awareness of God is present in the question of God. This awareness precedes the question. It is not the result of the argument but its presupposition. This certainly means that the 'argument' is not argument at all. It shows that an awareness of the infinite is included in man's awareness of finitude. Man knows that he is finite, that he is excluded from an infinity which nevertheless belongs to him.

He is aware of his potential infinity while being aware of his actual finitude." (Tillich, 1968, P.228) An immediate awareness of God, however faint, is part of the structure of human nature. Man may even be 'unconscious' of it, but the unarticulated awareness cannot be denied. Man knows that he is conditioned, and this points to his awareness of the unconditional element in reality. The unconditional is Beingitself, the true God. Being-itself is that which is not a special being or a group of beings, not something concrete or something abstract, but something which is always thought implicitly or sometimes explicitly is something is said to be. (Tillich, 1968, P.163)

Therefore, God as the Being-itself is the presupposition of any claim that something exists, but it does not mean that Being-itself exists. Its self-validation, to Tillich, is logically irrefutable. He writes, "You can deny any statement, but you cannot deny that being 'is'. You can deny anything particular whatsoever, but not being, because even your negative judgments themselves are acts of being and are only possible through being." (1967, P.80) When we consider a specific being such as a mountain or a fountain, we may affirm its existence or deny it. Tillich holds that it is in the possibility of such determination of beings that we affirm the reality of Being-itself. For being is the presupposition of ever affirmation and negation. We do not affirm it by consciously thinking about it; rather, in the very act of dealing with the question of the existence or non-existence of particular beings, we presuppose its reality. We presuppose the reality of that which is not a particular being, but that which accounts for there being something rather than nothing. Being-itself accounts for the fact that human beings exist, for their ability to raise question of finitude. Being-itself is not a specific entity. It is not a being, not even the highest being, necessary or perfect being. It is not a limited or contingent being that exists alongside others. It is the ground of there being anything at all. It is not the sort of entity that could conceivably exist. The Scholastics reasoning tends to limit God, by applying the word 'exist' to him. Any specific being is limited by the mere existence of other beings. Other beings are what it is not.

About the Being-itself that is God, the unconditioned, which is the presupposition of everything that is, Tillich writes in his Systematic Theology, "The unconditional element appears in the theoretical (receiving) function of reason as 'verum ipsum', the true-itself as the norm of all approximations of truth. The unconditional element appears in the practical (shaping) function of reason as 'bonum ipsum', the good-itself as the norm of all approximations to goodness. Both are manifestations of 'esse-ipsum', beingitself as the ground and abyss of everything that is." (P.229) The above statement is suggestive of Tillich's remarkable sensitivity to the philosophy of Scholasticism, despite his differences elsewhere. For, here, Tillich talks of being-itself as it is manifested in the realm of knowledge and morality. He is in agreement with the Scholastics here. In another passage he talks of being-itself in terms of transcendence and immanence, "As the power of God transcends every being and also the totality of being - the world, Being-itself is beyond finitude and infinity, otherwise it would be conditioned by something other than itself, and the real

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

power of being would lie beyond both it and that which conditions it. Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite 'jump'. On the other hand everything finite participates in being-itself and its infinity. Otherwise it would not have the power of being." (Tillich, 1968, P.263) Thus, we see that, for Tillich, like the Scholastics, both transcendence and immanence are reconciled in the concept of participation. The finite beings participate and have their being in beingitself, but they do so in a limited way, hence, being-itself transcends them infinitely. The above analysis of God's being is consistent, because Tillich spoke of God existentially as the transcendent object of man's ultimate concern. He maintained that we would not know of our ultimate concern without participation in being itself.

### 7. Conclusion

To conclude, one may have noticed by now that there is a certain presupposition, which is implicit in Tillich's vigorous argument that 'God does not exist'. He presupposes the meaning of 'existence' to be 'as we exist'. To exist 'as we exist', of course means to owe our whole reality to accidents and our continuance in existence to the favorable conditions of our environment. So, if to exist means 'as we exist', then, God does not exist. If 'existence' refers to something which can be found within the whole of reality, then, no divine being may be said to exist. But, then, we can surely raise the question as to why 'to exist' must mean 'as we do'? Tillich does not clarify this. This indeed is the objection against him, as adduced by William L. Rowe, "The paradox in Tillich is that in spite of his claim that existence is incompatible with the nature of God he nevertheless talks of God in such a way (as) to imply or presuppose that God exists. It is obvious that he cannot have it both ways." (1968, P.83) What Rowe is suggesting here is that Tillich wants to talk of God in such a way as to suggest that he exists, but, at the same time, to preclude the semantic possibility of raising the question of the existence of God. The question is how statements about God, which Tillich takes for granted, can be considered as true, if the statement, 'God exists', is false. To this criticism we can only reply that, firstly, Rowe is mistaken, if he believes that Tillich somehow implicitly suggest that God exists. 'God does not exist' is a statement most emphatic in Tillich's works. There is no ambiguity on this issue. However, the statement, 'God does not exist', does not mean that Tillich denies the reality of God. He does affirm that 'God is', although he denies that 'God exists'. Secondly, Rowe is mistaken, because Rowe takes such of those statements of Tillich as are made by him about God in the literal sense. Tillich never meant them to be literal statements about God. Rather they are symbolic expressions of being-itself.

### References

- [1] Anselm, St. *St. Anselm's Prosologion*, trans. by M. J. Charlesworth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- [2] Aquinas, St. Thomas. *De Potentia Dei*, trans. by Lawrence Shapcote, Westminster, Md., 1952.

- [3] Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and (for vol. 3) Anthony Kenny. Eds. and Trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1-3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- [4] Descartes, Rene. *Descartes' Meditations*, as translated by John Veitch 1901.
- [5] Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason, trans. by Norman Kempt Smith, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990.
- [6] Kegley, Charles W. and Bretall, Robert W. (eds.). The Theology of Paul Tillich, New York and London: The Macmillan, 1952.
- [7] Rowe, William L. Religious Symbol and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- [8] Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1946.
- [9] Spinoza, Benedictus de. Edited and Translated by Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- [10] Tillich, Paul. *The Protestant Era*, Trans. and with a Concluding Essay by James Luther Adams, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.
- [11] Tillich, Paul. *My Search for Absolutes*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.
- [12] Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols., Digswell: James Nisbett & Co., London: 1968.

### **Author Profile**

**T. Jamedi Longkumer** received the M.A and Ph.D degrees in Philosophy from North Eastern Hill University in 1998 and 2003, respectively. He is currently serving as Assistant Professor in Dimapur Government College under the Higher Education Department of Government of Nagaland, India.

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

<u>Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY</u>



# 'I Am that I Am' (Ex. 3.14): from Augustine to Abhishiktānanda—Holy Ground Between Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedānta

Daniel Soars 1

Published online: 07 July 2020 © The Author(s) 2020

#### Abstract

We shall revisit a debate which has been going on at least since pioneering British Indologists like William Jones first encountered the 'Brahmanic theology' we now know as Vedanta, namely, the nature of the relationship—if any between certain forms of 'western' and 'Indian' idealisms, and how these metaphysical systems have influenced Christian theology. Specifically, we look at the question of possible thematic and conceptual convergences between Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedānta, and argue that significant parallels can be found in their common conception of the Absolute as Being. Rather than attempt a comprehensive overview of the two systems, we take the divine 'I AM' revealed to Moses in Exodus 3.14 as the *locus classicus* of Christian philosophical interpretations of God as Being itself, and explore how four seminal figures read this passage in light of Neoplatonic and Vedantic influences. We shall see that similarities and divergences in the readings of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart and Henri Le Saux can be understood in terms of how they negotiate the relation between the One and the many, or between 'being' and 'knowing'. The more these figures allow themselves to be influenced by Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedanta, the more we see any clear ontological distinction between creature and Creator start to break down. This verse, therefore, proves to be an unusually fruitful test case for exploring the relation between the underlying Neoplatonic and Vedāntic metaphysics which structure varying Christian interpretations of it.

**Keywords** Exodus 3.14 · Neoplatonism · Advaita Vedanta



<sup>☐</sup> Daniel Soars djs85@cam.ac.uk

Faculty of Divinity, The University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

'If properly understood, these Vedânta teachings may, though under a strange form, bring us very near to the earliest Christian philosophy, and help us to understand it, as it was understood by the great thinkers of Alexandria'. (Max-Müller 1919, p.124).

The question of the possible relationship between some forms of Greek and Indian theological idealisms—specifically, between (neo)-Platonism and (Advaita) Vedānta is a long-standing one. At stake are two distinct issues: an empirical one of historical cross-fertilization between the two traditions, on the one hand, and a hermeneuticalphilosophical one of structural and conceptual analogies which may or may not result from actual instances of historical encounter, on the other. In the first case, scholarship has tended to focus on perceived parallels between the writings of Plotinus (c.205– 270 CE) and certain resonant conceptual themes in the Upanisads (the 'end'—anta—of the Vedas)—with debate centring around whether or not these parallels provide evidence of direct historical contact between Plotinus and the Indian sources. In the second case, the comparative discussion tends to bracket the question of actual historical borrowing across the traditions as a largely unanswerable one, and concentrates instead on trying to distinguish between merely surface similarities and deeper philosophical convergences in certain doctrines we find in a Neoplatonist like Plotinus and a Vedāntin like Śamkara (c.788–820 CE). In order to offer some contextual background to the two traditions, I will briefly review the historical debate, but my aim here is to contribute to the comparative theological-philosophical discussion, not to put forward an argument (one way or the other) for actual historical contact.

I do this from a slightly unusual angle, by focusing on a single verse from the Hebrew scriptures (Exodus 3.14) and how it has been read by four figures in the Christian tradition. The justification for examining possible parallels between Hellenic Neoplatonism and Sanskritic Vedānta through a Judaeo-Christian lens might not seem obvious, but this one verse provides a particularly concentrated and fruitful test case for our conceptual experiment, given its long interpretation history and appeal to a certain philosophical temperament within Christian theology. Specifically, this verse has proven to be a *locus classicus* of Christian philosophical interpretations of God as 'Being' itself.<sup>2</sup> By exploring the fundamental question of the conceptual and metaphysical identity of God and Being in what we might call 'Christian Platonism'—specifically, as this question of 'God-Being' is manifested in the long and varied interpretation history of a single scriptural verse and its hidden, or 'mystical' meaning—I am indebted to the work of Werner Beierwaltes (Beierwaltes 1972, p.1–64).<sup>3</sup> Importantly for my argument, it is also a verse to which certain figures in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Beierwaltes 1972, only exists in the original German. When the citations I have used are crucial to my argument, I have translated them myself into English.



The Some scholars reject the traditional 788–820 dating, which emerged only in the late nineteenth century based on an alleged writing of Śamkara that is now deemed spurious. No one disagrees that Śamkara likely lived about 32 years, but he is now regularly dated as having lived "c.700 CE." To follow this up in more detail, see Malkovsky 2001, p.1–8. Either way, this makes no material difference to my argument since the suggestion is not that Plotinus and Śamkara ever actually met.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The broader argument for the use of Greek thought as a conceptual vehicle for expressing Christian beliefs – particularly Platonic concepts as developed and structured by key pagan figures in the early centuries of the Christian era, like Plotinus, Porphyry (232–305), Iamblichus (245–326) and Proclus (412–485) – has been made persuasively elsewhere (e.g. O'Meara 1982), so it is not my intention to engage directly in this metaconversation here.

Vedāntic traditions have pointed in support of a non-dualistic (*a-dvaitic*) reading of the 'relation' between the world and God in Christianity. My aim is to focus on four Christian appropriations of this characteristically Platonic and Vedāntic philosophical identification of the Absolute with 'Being' as such, in order to explore how far arguments for convergence between (neo)-Platonism and (Advaita) Vedānta can be pushed.

I will begin by looking at how Ex. 3.14 was understood by St Augustine (354-430 CE), to see how his exegesis is shaped by his well-attested indebtedness to Platonism. I will then turn to two medieval figures who were influenced by Augustine and, to greater or lesser extents, by the Platonism which had formed him: Thomas Aguinas (1225–74) and Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) will offer an interesting interim comparison in their own right, given that they are often seen as representing quite different aspects of the Christian theological tradition—the 'scholastic' and the 'mystical'. Finally, I will turn to a twentieth century Benedictine, Henri Le Saux (1910–73), who became better known as Swami Abhishiktānanda after he moved to India to begin a lifelong struggle of trying to reconcile his Roman Catholic Christianity (coloured, certainly, by Augustine, Aquinas and Eckhart) with the spiritual and metaphysical frameworks of Advaita Vedānta. If there really are deep metaphysical convergences between (neo)-Platonism and (Advaita) Vedanta, we might reasonably expect to find some thematic continuities running through all four figures. Of course, by focusing on their interpretations of a single verse, we cannot hope to provide a comprehensive survey of all the possible similarities and dissimilarities between the two systems, but excellent studies of this kind already exist (e.g. Staal 1961, Harris 1981, Hacker 1995 and Paulos Gregorios 2002). The purpose of this essay is to put the debate into sharp focus, by pointing a single beam at an unusually pregnant scriptural passage which has attracted the attention of Christians (and Vedāntins) influenced by both Platonism and Vedānta. While Le Saux's reading is distinguished from the other three by the fact that he studied Vedānta, we will see that he picks up on some of the same (Neoplatonic) themes as the earlier Christian thinkers we examine. 4 By tracing the contours of their differing interpretations, we will be able to see precisely which conceptual lines converge and where comparison might break down under the weight of doctrinal tensions that are less easily reconcilable.

# Parmenides, Plato and 'Brahmanic Theology'

In a fascinating observation in one of his letters, the pioneering East India Company scholar of Indology, William Jones (1746–1794), makes the following assessment of the 'Brahmanic theology' he is encountering in Bengal:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Given the logic of my argument, this point could also be put the other way around, i.e. the earlier Christian thinkers – insomuch as and to the extent that they were influenced by Neoplatonism – were conceptually 'as if' influenced by Advaita Vedānta, even if not historically so, since they thought in some ways like Advaitins. <sup>5</sup> Along with Charles Wilkins (1749–1836) and Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837), William Jones is widely recognised as one of the most important Orientalists of the Company era in India. Supported by the then Governor-General, Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the pioneering work of these civil servant scholars opened up Indology as an academic discipline for future generations. For more on this period, see the detailed and influential study by Kopf 1969.



'The doctrine is that of Parmenides and Plato, whom our Berkley [sic] follows, and I am strongly inclined to consider their philosophy as the only means of removing the difficulties which attend the common opinions concerning the Material world'. (App 2009, p.18)

The 'Brahmanic theology' to which Jones refers is the systematic tradition of commentary, exegesis, and philosophical interpretation of the Upanisads, better known to us today as Vedānta. By comparing Vedāntic teachings with those found in Parmenides and Plato, Jones is entering a debate which has continued ever since. As I have already outlined, this is a debate which can take two different directions—the first, an empirical-speculative investigation into possible historical contact between Platonism and Vedanta. This first issue has tended to revolve around questions over the possible Eastern (where this could mean anything from Indian to Persian or Egyptian) influences on the philosophy of Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism.<sup>7</sup> That there were some 'Eastern' influences on Plotinus's thought seems undeniable; he was born in Egypt, and studied in Alexandria where there were already Brahmins and Buddhists by the first century CE. Indeed, Plotinus's student and editor, Porphyry, tells us that the Platonic teaching his master received in Alexandria from Ammonius Saccas inspired him to find out more about Persian and Indian thought (Porphyry, On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books, in Armstrong, *Ennead I*, 1969). As a result, Plotinus joined the Emperor Gordian's military expedition to Persia, perhaps hoping to go on from there to the subcontinent, but never got as far as India.8 Whether or not he went on to read Indian metaphysical texts or, indeed, discuss them with Brahmins in Alexandria is a fascinating but probably unresolvable question. Nevertheless, the issue of whether the similarities between elements of Neoplatonism as found in Plotinus and aspects of Indian thought are merely the result of coincidental osmosis, a philosophia perennis, or evidence of more direct influence captured the imagination of certain scholars in the twentieth century. Some, like E. Bréhier, advocated a strong 'Oriental hypothesis', while others, like A.H. Armstrong and J. Rist argued that the seeds of all of Plotinus's key doctrines could be found closer to home, in his own Hellenistic context.9

What I am more interested in here is Jones's suggestion that there is something of fundamental philosophical importance in the Greek and Indic traditions which may be 'the only means of removing the difficulties which attend the common opinions concerning the material world'. His allusion to Berkeley would imply that the means he has in mind—and which he claims to find in similar form in India and in Greece—is some kind of philosophical idealism. Idealism is a term which is, of course, notoriously

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See R.T. Ciapola, 'Bréhier and Rist on Plotinus', in Gregorios (2002), p.71–79. For more general overviews, see R.K. Tripathi, 'Advaita Vedanta and Neoplatonism' and C.L. Tripathi, 'The Influence of Indian Philosophy on Neoplatonism' in Harris (1981).



The citation comes from William Jones in Cannon 1970, p. 669–70, and is taken here from App 2009, p.18.

For an overview of the scholarship on this question, see Albert M. Wolters, 'A Survey of Modern Scholarly Opinion on Plotinus and Indian Thought', in Harris 1981, p.293–309. While the terminology of 'Middle' and later ('Neo') Platonism is widely used, it should be remembered that these distinctions themselves are not neutral historical labels since they imply stronger demarcations of the Platonic tradition than some scholars (or perhaps even Plotinus himself!) would be willing to accept.

For more on this episode, see Gregorios 2002, p.13–17.

polyvalent and liable to misunderstanding even within western philosophical traditions, so trying to overlay it onto a thought system not conceived with these categories in mind is fraught with exceptional difficulty. As if this were not enough reason to be wary, several different Vedāntic schools developed in India towards the end of the first millennium of the Common Era and into the second—each offering distinctive accounts of the metaphysical worldview found in the Upaniṣads —and the question of how far any of them neatly map on to what a western philosopher is likely to understand by 'idealism' is a complex one. With these provisos in mind, however, if we can take 'the doctrine of Parmenides and Plato' to be 'idealist' in the minimal sense of claiming the dependency or derivation of the material realm upon or from the spiritual, it would be reasonable to see the 'Brahmanic theology' Jones has in mind as similarly 'idealist'.

The dominant school of Vedanta (in the sense that it was the archetype against which doctrinal opponents would, explicitly or implicitly, set their own arguments) became the non-dual or 'advaita' (literally, 'not-two') form as found in its most celebrated exponent, Samkara. Typically taken to be a reading of scripture which holds that there is, transcendentally speaking, only *one* changeless ground of being (*Brahman*) and that the manifold world of experience is, from an ultimate perspective, merely an 'appearance' of this simple and undivided Reality, Advaita Vedanta is usually seen as a form of idealism in which the world is either metaphysically illusory or, at the very least, ontologically dependent on its hyper-ground which is Brahman.<sup>14</sup> Given Plotinus's doctrine of the emanation of all being from the One who is 'beyond being', it is not difficult to see why Plotinus and Śamkara have proven to be amenable to scholarly comparisons of (Neo)-Platonism and Vedanta en gros. The key task for our purposes is to identify the precise nature of the philosophical and conceptual themes which have drawn scholars to ask in the first place about possible analogies between the two systems—for it is these themes which we would expect to find in Christians influenced by (Neo)-Platonism, like Augustine, Aquinas and Eckhart, and Christians influenced by Vedānta, like Abhishiktānanda, if there really are connections between these forms of Greek and Indian idealisms.

The most detailed full-length study of the issue of philosophical convergences specifically between Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedānta suggests that we are likely to find significant parallels *and* divergences in our four Christian figures (Staal 1961). As well as important differences between the two systems, J.F.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> For a historical survey of 'realist v idealist' interpretations of Advaita, see Malkovsky 2001, p.46–50. In many ways, these debates resemble similar ones in Platonism scholarship, and often have as much to do with what one means by 'realist' and 'idealist' as they do with what Śamkara and Plato actually said (or meant).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> That is not to say that a similar kind of distinction between realism and idealism is utterly unknown in the Indian tradition because disputes between Advaita and, say, the Nyāya–Vaiśeşika school clearly suggest otherwise, but only that these terms come laden with preconceptions when used from within their Western (Graeco-Roman and later primarily German) philosophical contexts.

For a comprehensive overview of these different interpretations of the Upanişadic revelation, see Lott 1980. To follow up this question of how far different Indian philosophical systems can be considered 'idealist', and what precisely this might mean, see Pandey 2015, p.26–44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Jones's reference to Berkeley here is potentially misleading as the Irish bishop's form of subjective idealism seems quite different from anything that Parmenides or Plato put forward, and my focus here is on how far Vedānta resembles Platonic idealism (i.e. minimally, that the physical world is ontologically dependent on and, in some sense, inferior to intelligible spiritual reality, not that the physical world can be reduced to a bundle of perceptions).

Staal contends that there are deep conceptual resonances to be found in certain doctrines—not least, in the focus in both systems on the Absolute as unlimited Being and on union with the Absolute through self-knowledge. 15 While it might be objected that the Absolute in Plotinus's Neo-Platonism is 'beyond being' (Ennead V.5.6), 16 Staal sees no contradiction between this and Samkara's affirmation that Brahman is Being (sat), for both intend the same thing—that the Absolute is beyond qualified and intelligible being. Both Plotinus and Samkara, moreover, would agree, Staal argues, that the physical world is a-dvaita with the Absolute; 'For what comes from him [the One] has not been cut off from him, nor is it the same as him...' (Ennead V.3.12). If similar conceptions of the Absolute and its relation to the physical world can be found in Neoplatonism and Vedānta—conceptions which seem to indicate similar kinds of religious idealism (in which the material derives from and is dependent on the spiritual)—then it is also true to say that the implications of this non-dualism between the many and the One are similar in both ancient systems. If the Absolute is the unlimited plenitude of Being, then we find God/Brahman not by looking 'outside' for 'anything more', but by turning inward and realizing our presence in the All:

'But if "you will seek nothing anymore", however will this happen to you? Now it is because you approached the All and did not remain in a part of it, and you did not even say of yourself 'I am just so much', but by rejecting the 'so much' you have become all—yet even before this you were all; but because something else came to you after the "all" you became less by the addition: for the addition did not come from being—you will add nothing to that—but from non-being'. (Ennead VI.5.12).

'Whatever is made of clay, like a pot and so on, is only and always entirely nothing but clay. Similarly, all this that is the effect of the Real, is the Real itself, and entirely nothing but the Real. Because nothing exists, anywhere, anytime, other than the Real, That is the Truth, your own Self. Therefore, That thou art, supremely serene, pure, the Supreme, the non-dual Absolute'. (*Vivekacūdāmaṇi* 253)<sup>17</sup>

We shall now focus on how these two related conceptual themes—viz. equating the Absolute with unlimited Being and what we might call conversion or subjectivity (recognising that 'I'—in my deepest Self—am the 'All')—feature in Augustine, Aquinas, Eckhart and Abhishiktānanda, and, in particular, in their readings of Ex. 3.14.

# Being, Knowing and Exodus 3.14

As intimated by W. Jones, the link between Being and origins, and the identification of the first principle of Being with God (*theos*), was clearly present in Greek thought

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> It should be noted that there is some scholarly disagreement over whether this text can authentically be attributed to Śaṁkara or is the work of a later Advaitin. To follow this up, see the Introduction to Grimes 2004. In any case, this verse would be acceptable to any Advaitin, given that it is really just a gloss on Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> M. Just sees Plotinus's focus on subjectivity (self-knowledge) and mystical union, in contrast to a more typically 'Hellenic' emphasis on rationality, clarity and objectivity as *the* reason to suppose that Plotinus might have had 'Eastern' influences. See Just 2013, p.3.

 $<sup>^{16}</sup>$  From ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας in *Republic* 509b. Citations from Plotinus are all taken from Armstrong's Loeb version.

before Plato (*c*.428–347 BCE). Along with other pre-Socratic philosophers, <sup>18</sup> Parmenides (*c*. late sixth–early fifth century BCE) identifies Being in ways which remained influential not only in the later Platonic tradition but also on the Christian thinkers we will discuss. That Parmenides' enigmatic poem ('On Nature') is in part a conversation with a goddess suggests that he saw his search for an understanding of ultimate origins as a religious one, an encounter with the ground of existence is also an encounter with the divine. The goddess explains that Being is 'ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect', (Fragment 8.1–4 in Coxon 2009) and, as such, all that *is* and can be thought, since what 'is not' lies down a path which cannot be trodden; there simply is no-thing there to know or to think.<sup>19</sup>

Precisely, these defining characteristics of 'God-Being' are evident in the first philosophical interpretations of the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus 3.14 (ego eimi ho on). From Philo of Alexandria (20-50 CE) to Patristic writers like Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390 CE) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 CE), the basic conceptual distinction is the one we find in Parmenides—that is between 'Being' (now identified by Christian theologians with God as 'He who is') and non-being. Following the goddesses' description, the divine name given to Moses, according to these biblical exegetes, reveals God as eternal, unchanging, limitless Being.<sup>20</sup> These onto-theological Parmenidean themes, developed and systematised by Plato, are taken up in Christian theology from early on in the tradition via the mediations of so-called Middle Platonists like Plutarch (46-120 CE) and, especially, Neo-Platonists like Plotinus and his student, Porphyry (Beierwaltes 1972, p.16-24). By identifying the Absolute as either Being itself or as the One 'beyond Being', Greek philosophy provided the metaphysical resources for highly sophisticated Christian interpretations of the divine name revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

As we explore how four seminal thinkers understood the enigmatic divine name revealed on Mount Horeb (Ex. 3.14, 'I am he who is'/'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh)<sup>21</sup>, we will see that each of their interpretations is distinctively both *Platonist* (and, in Le Saux's case, *Vedāntic*) and *Christian*, but that it is their way of conceptualising the relationship between 'thought' and 'being', and between 'knowledge' of God and 'identity' with God, which distinguishes them. In order to bring out these continuities and differences more clearly, I have chosen only one figure who can be thought of fairly uncontroversially as a 'Christian Platonist' (or a Platonist Christian), namely, St Augustine; when it comes to the other three, some may doubt the extent to which they can be unambiguously described as 'Platonist' (in the case of Thomas Aquinas), 'Christian' (in the case of Meister Eckhart) or either 'Christian' or 'Platonist' in the case of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Henri le Saux).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> New Jerusalem Bible translation. Clearly, this verse raises all sorts of philological, exegetical and theological questions, which I do not pretend to solve in this paper. My focus will solely be on the four thinkers under discussion.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Such as the even earlier figure of Anaximander (c.611–546 BCE).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> For more on the relationship between 'thought' and 'being' in Parmenides, see Perl 2014, esp. p.3–17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Cf. Beierwaltes 1972, p.14. 'Dieses Sein meint zeitfreie Gegenwärtigkeit, unwandelbare Vollendetheit, reine Wirklichkeit und unbegrenztes In-sich-Sein'.

# Augustine (354-430 CE)

Just as previous figures like Philo and the Church Fathers had seen in this pivotal verse in Exodus a confirmation of God's eternal ('ungenerated and imperishable'), simple ('entire and unique') and unchanging ('unmoved and perfect') nature, so Augustine follows these Platonic themes in his interpretation of God's 'I am'. In particular, in his early work *On True Religion (De vera religione*—written *c.*390, only about 3 years after being baptised a Christian), in some of his commentaries on the Psalms (Augustine 1979, esp. of Ps. 38 and 101), and in his *Confessions*, Augustine focuses on the eternity and immutability of 'He who is'.<sup>22</sup>

In a remarkable passage in the *Confessions*, the then bishop recounts his discovery of God's nature as Being itself by means of a 'conversion' or turning inward of his gaze:

'By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel...When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being...and I found myself far from you 'in the region of dissimilarity' and heard as it were your voice from on high: 'I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me'. ...And you cried from far away: 'Now, I am who I am' (Exod. 3:14)'. (Augustine 2008, VII.x.16).

It was thanks to these 'Platonic books' that Augustine was able to leave behind his Manichean dualism and gradually 'seek for immaterial truth' (Augustine 2008, VII.xx.26) and find God as Spirit, as He who 'truly is'. He worked through the consequences of this discovery in his early writings (such as *De vera religione*) before paying Exodus 3.14 any particular attention, <sup>23</sup> but his subsequent readings of this verse confirming God as 'Being' itself helped to establish 'He who is' as "the main divine name in the Latin West" (Zum Brunn 1988, vii). The stage had been set for Augustine by the Platonism of figures like Plotinus, <sup>24</sup> Porphyry and Marius Victorinus (Augustine 2008, VIII.ii.3)—indeed, without this Neoplatonist philosophy, Beierwaltes sees Augustine's concept of God and Being as simply unthinkable (Beierwaltes 1972, p.37). <sup>25</sup>

Three themes which appear in the above passage and run as leitmotifs throughout Augustine's work are particularly pertinent to the relation between 'knowing' and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> 'Wie eine umfängliche und teilweise intensive Forschung gezeigt hat, ist Augustins Begriff von Gott und Sein nicht denkbar ohne die Philosophie des Neuplatonismus, insbesondere Plotins und Porphyrys; Marius Victorinus kommt eine für Augustin bedeutende Vermittlerrolle in bezug auf neuplatonische Philosopheme zu'. It is important to note, alongside Beierwaltes' emphasis on *Neo*platonism, that Augustine was also influenced by the 'middle Platonism' of Philo, via the Alexandrian Christian thinkers Clement (150-c.215 CE) and Origen (184–253 CE). See Norris Clarke 2009, p.72, and Boland 1996, p.38–47.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Beierwaltes argues that Augustine's distinctive emphasis is on God's 'eternity' (1972, p.27) while Zum Brunn sees it as being more on 'immutability'—cf. Zum Brunn 1988, p.104–5. Given divine simplicity, though, this choice of emphasis only reflects a conceptual distinction, and not an ontological one because God's 'eternity' is not an attribute which stands in contrast to God's 'immutability'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> For more on the relative chronology of Augustine's encounter with Platonism, his conversion to Christianity and his key works, see Zum Brunn 1988, p.98–99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Plotinus's 1984/1988 influence can be seen overtly in the passage from Augustine's *Confessions* quoted above—not least in the idea of 're-turning inward' (cf. Ennead V.1.1) and the physical world being a 'region of dissimilarity' from the One (cf. Ennead I.8.13, from Plato, *Statesman* 273d).

'being' as a conceptual seam which links Neoplatonism and Vedānta. Firstly, Augustine establishes a dialectic between 'Being' and 'nothingness' (*nihil*), which makes his ontology not merely speculative but anagogical (Beierwaltes 1972, p.27). By being 'raised up' (through divine grace), Augustine sees that he is 'not yet Being', since being 'created' means precisely to stand out (*existere*) between, as it were, the absolute Being of 'He who is' and the absolute nothingness of non-existence. Secondly, we can see in the passage that 'at-*one*-ment', or salvation, for Augustine, begins with 'finding oneself far from God, in the region of dissimilarity' and consists in nothing other than turning back to God by 'changing into Him', since it is up to the creature '...to settle either in Being or in a state close to nothingness, according to whether or not it confirms the "wanting-to-be" (*esse uelle*) rooted in it, that is to say the desire of a greater participation in Being than the one which is its own from the simple fact of existing' (Zum Brunn 1988, p.191). Thirdly, this process of being brought back (by divine grace) to one's own essence by drawing ever closer to the 'first Essence' is effected by a Plotinian 'return into oneself', a remembering of what one truly *is*. As Zum Brunn puts it,

'...if the Immutable is not envisaged from the point of view of a metaphysics of conversion, the Augustinian definition of God-Being is cut down, for Immutable Being is only reached at the conclusion of a return that transforms the soul to its likeness, in virtue of the principle according to which the like is only known by the like. It is why, like that of its Platonic models, this ontology is essentially an ontology of spiritual life'. (Zum Brunn 1988, p.101–2).<sup>29</sup>

This spiritual life, however, is not one, in the fullest sense, which Augustine thought he could find in the 'Platonists' books' because while they had shown him the vision of 'what truly is' (Augustine 2008, VII.xx.26) they could not take him there. This 'way' he came to find in the Christian scriptures and, in particular, in the mediatory figure of Christ (Augustine 2008, VII.xx.27). This is why Augustine's reading of Exodus 3.14 is thoroughly Platonic but also distinctively Christian, because while he uses the language of a Neoplatonic metaphysics of return (i.e. that conversion is about ontological assimilation to 'He who is'), he also uses overt eucharistic imagery of 'feeding', 30 and draws parallels between the *Ego sum qui sum* of Mount Horeb and the 'I am'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> As noted above, this note of likeness appears in the texts of the 'early Augustine'—the later Augustine would state that the creature is utterly *unlike* the creator whose ways are inaccessible to human intellects. <sup>30</sup> For more on Augustine's (and Aquinas's) Christological interpretations of Ex. 3:14, see Soskice 2014, p.190–207, here p.203.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> 'Eine Scheidung setzt er [Augustin] zwischen dem wandelbaren, weil der Zeit unterworfenen, welthaft Seienden, und dem Prinzip oder Grund dieses Seienden...'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> 'Absolute Being...is *summum esse*, *ipsum esse*, *uere esse*, or *quod est*, also expressed, with the help of the Exodus verse 3:14, by the personal forms *ego sum qui sum*, *qui est*, and in an abbreviated way *sum est*. In contrast, the ontological deficiency, which characterizes our existence as long as it is not regenerated by the conversion to Being, Augustine calls according to the circumstances *minus esse*, *non uere esse*, or still *utcumque esse*'. Zum Brunn 1988, p.2. Cf. *Conf.* VII.xv (21): 'So all things are real insofar as they have being, and the term 'falsehood' applies only when something is thought to have being which does not'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> It should be noted that while the so-called early Augustine, around 389, seems to have argued that it is 'up to us' to turn back to God through a structured programme of Neoplatonic cultivation of the virtues, the 'late' Augustine, around 430, would vehemently deny such a possibility of human-instigated return to God—it is only God who turns us around, and more specifically only those of us who are timelessly predestined, towards salvation.

sayings in John's Gospel.<sup>31</sup> It might be considered anachronistic to label Augustine a 'mystic', but in his desire for ever greater union with the God in whom 'we live and move and are' (Acts 17.28, cited in Augustine 2008, VII.ix.15), he perceives the 'hidden' meaning of the divine name revealed to Moses to be the soteriological key which will allow him to equate *knowing* the Reality that *is* with being transformed by love into it:

'Such is finally the ultimate foundation of the difference between God and the created being. God is what he has, he is by himself; the created being is not what it has, it only has a borrowed being...Therefore, if in Augustine there is no possible equivocation between God's being and that of the created beings, there also isn't any real duality between them in this monism of Being inspired by Plotinus...' (Zum Brunn 1988, p.106–7).

# Neoplatonic Mysticism in Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Meister Eckhart (1260–1327)

Zum Brunn concedes that there is nothing new in Augustine's ontological interpretation of Ex. 3.14—there had been a long tradition of identifying 'He who is' with Being per se in the Greek and Latin Fathers ever since Philo of Alexandria (Zum Brunn 1988, p.109–110). Augustine's originality, she suggests, is in the abundant use he makes of the verse, the explicit links he draws between it and the *ego eimi* of John's Gospel<sup>32</sup> and, not least, in the stimulus he gave to medieval discussions of the divine name.<sup>33</sup> It is to two of these discussions that we will now turn to show how Augustine's Christian-Platonist reading of the name revealed to Moses is picked up and reworked according to the distinctive emphases of two medieval Dominicans—St Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. Both continue to work with Augustine's (Parmenidean) ontology of 'that which is' as opposed to 'that which is not', in other words, of Being and nothingness, 'a immutability and change<sup>35</sup> and eternity and temporality, and both will continue to emphasise the Neoplatonic (and Vedāntic) theme of the relatedness of knowledge and being, of the creature's 'is-ness' and the divine 'I am'. Indeed, John Hick goes so far as to claim that:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> '...only that which is not only not changed, but cannot undergo any change at all, can be called being in the truest sense without any scruple'. Augustine (1970), *The Trinity*, 5.2.3.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See, e.g. *In Iohannis evangelium* 2,2. For more on the correspondences Augustine draws between Ex. 3:14 and Gospel passages like Romans 1:20, cf. Zum Brunn 1988, p.110–111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Zum Brunn points out that Augustine was the first of the Latin Fathers to explicitly relate Ex. 3:14 to the 'I am' sayings in the Fourth Gospel and that this parallel was also not found in the Greek Fathers before John Chrysostom (349–407), who was contemporary with Augustine (cf. Zum Brunn 1988, p.109–114).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Cf. also Beierwaltes 1972, p.38: 'Dem Mittelalter ist Augustinus eine der groβen Autoritäten. Dadurch ist mittelbar auch neuplatonisches Denken tradiert und im eigentümlich neuen Ansatz am Leben erhalten und zugleich umgeformt worden'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> "I am who I am and you will say to the children of Israel: he who is has sent me to you"; which means that, compared to the one who truly is, because he is immutable, the changing created things are not; it is exactly what Plato asserted forcefully and taught without getting tired of it…' Augustine, *City of God*, 8.12. Cf. also *Exp. Of Psalms*. 134, 6.

'...it is not an exaggeration to say that during the early and medieval periods, the picture of the universe accepted by Christian mystics, and the forms of religious experience that they reciprocally reflected and shaped, were a series of echoes of Neoplatonism'. Elsewhere in the article the style has been to include the reference for the citation in brackets after the quote rather than as an endnote. In this case it would be (Hick 1999, p.144).<sup>36</sup>

While 'mysticism' was not a word used until the early-modern period to denote a specific conceptual or experiential category of Christian spirituality, *mystikos* was present from the beginnings of the Christian tradition as an epithet used to refer to what is 'hidden'—most often, the 'hidden' meaning of scripture. The idea of a 'mystical theology' *tout court* was not coined as a term until Dionysius's fifth-century treatise by the same name, and, in the Pseudo-Areopagite's insistence that the theologic (i.e. manner of speaking about God) he is espousing is as much a spiritual *practice* as it is an intellectual exercise, <sup>37</sup> we can start to see how, over centuries, a term originally used to denote the 'real' or 'deeper' meaning of divine self-revelation in texts also came to signify something closer to what Hick has in mind—namely, to a 'mystical' experience of union with God. <sup>38</sup> In other words, coming closer to the 'hidden' meaning of scripture does not involve merely rational exegesis but a wholehearted attempt to draw closer to the God who is simultaneously revealed and hidden there. <sup>39</sup>

That the word 'mystical' did come to acquire connotations of union with ultimate reality and that it did so in the Christian tradition at least partly via the mediating thought of Pseudo-Dionysius (c. late fifth–early sixth century CE) is not a coincidence, but one of the profound 'echoes of Neoplatonism' to which Hick refers. This is not to claim that every individual whom the Christian tradition would tend to recognise as a 'mystic' has also been a Neoplatonist (at least not self-consciously) or that the metaphysical-experiential notion of 'union' with the divine must necessarily always be parsed in terms of Neoplatonic philosophy, but simply to suggest that for many Christian mystics in the early and medieval periods, the 'picture of the universe that they accepted' and the 'forms of religious experience that they reflected and shaped' were, indeed, deeply influenced by Platonic themes and insights—and this is certainly true of Aquinas and Eckhart.

Just as Augustine is struck at the start of his *Confessions* by the same paradox which had confronted Moses—of how we can call upon God without knowing him, and how we can know God without calling upon him (Augustine



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*. Oxford Oneworld, Hick 1999, 144.

<sup>37 ....</sup>with your understanding laid aside...strive upward as much as you can towards union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is'. (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 997B–1000A).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Hick, ibid., 136. For more on this, see McGinn 1991, xiv. For the history of the word 'mysticism', see Bouyer 1980.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> This refusal to see scriptural exegesis as some kind of ostensibly 'neutral' academic exercise helps to dissolve the question of whether a particular interpretation is a faithful reading 'of' or a subjective reading 'into' a verse or passage—an anachronistic pseudo-problem well dismantled by R. Dobie in his article 'Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart on Exodus 3:14: Exegesis or Eisegesis?', *Medieval Mystical Theology* 24.2 (Dobie 2015), 124–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> On the Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius specifically, and how this later became influential on Thomas Aquinas, see O'Rourke 2005.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Obviously, most Neoplatonists were not Christians.

2008, I.1)—so Aquinas wrestles with the twin horns of the dilemma of 'knowing God' and 'naming God' in Questions 12 and 13 of the Prima Pars of his Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* (1964–1980). He concludes his question of how we can speak of God by arguing that 'The One who Is' is the most appropriate name for God, and he gives the following three reasons for thinking so (Aquinas 1964–1980, I.13.11): Firstly, because '...it does not signify any particular form, but existence itself. Since the existence of God is his essence, and since this is true of nothing else...it is clear that this name is especially fitting for God...'; secondly, Aquinas argues, it is the most 'universal' name we can apply to God because it does not restrict God to any particular mode of being, but refers to God as 'an infinite ocean of being...infinite and unlimited...[which] comprehends all in himself'. Thirdly, Ex. 3.14 offers us the best way of talking about God because it signifies 'being in the present' since tense cannot be applied to sheer Existence as such.

In his focus on God as the 'self-subsistent act of existence' (Aquinas 1964-1980, I.4.2), through which all things 'are', Aquinas turns to Neoplatonic concepts in order to explain the sui generis nature of the causation involved in creation—that is, the very causing-to-be of creatures. This is why Cornelio Fabro argued that Thomas's commentary on the anonymous Liber de Causis—a work inspired by Proclus' Elements of Theology—was the 'final step in his absorption of Neoplatonism' and, in particular, that Thomas's commentary on Proposition 18 of the De Causis represents 'the nucleus of the Thomistic metaphysics of causality' (Fabro, in O'Meara 1982, p.101). Here, Thomas explains that '...the first being [ens primum] gives being to all things by way of creation [per modum creationis]. But the first life, whatever that might be, does not give life by way of creation but by way of form'. 43 In other words, while Augustine focused on the connotations of Ex. 3.14 in terms of divine eternity and immutability, Aquinas's emphasis rests on God as the pure activity of Being-the 'I am' by which all creatures are sustained and in which they reside. The implications are that:

'As the cause of all creatures outside of whom nothing would exist, one cannot take up a position "outside" of the relationship between cause and effect, Creator and creature. Rather, the human intellect can know anything about God only by *participation* in God's wisdom itself. We must "enter into" God's wisdom or Word in order to understand it, just as we must "enter into" the light in order to see the light' (Dobie 2015, p.126, original emphasis).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Fabro was one of the first critics to highlight the importance of 'participation' in Thomas' metaphysics—cf. 'Platonic causality is actuated as a participation that is the "presence" of the cause in the thing caused. Causality shows itself to be a defence and a recovery of the unity of the real insofar as the multiplicity of the effects is gathered into the unity of the cause'. (Fabro, ibid., 104). As we will see, Eckhart takes this notion of ontological unity between creature and Creator to its logical extreme.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> C. Fabro, 'The overcoming of the Neoplatonic triad of Being, Life, and Intellect by St Thomas Aquinas' in O'Meara 1982, p.97–108, here p.97.

Aquinas, Commentary on the Book of Causes, prop.18, in Guagliardo et al. 1996. Italics signify Aquinas quoting from the Book of Causes in his exposition.
 Fabro was one of the first critics to highlight the importance of 'participation' in Thomas' metaphysics—cf.

Aquinas was aware of the possible pantheistic implications of a theological metaphysics of ontological continuity from effect to Cause, but he is nevertheless quite clear that 'knowing' and 'being' cannot be wholly separated. Having cited Augustine in support, he explains in Q.12 of the *Summa* that, when it comes to 'seeing' or knowing anything, '...we do not see unless the thing seen is somehow in us' (Aquinas 1964–1980, I.12.2, reply). However, given that God cannot possibly be an 'object' of knowledge (since, as Dobie rightly notes, we 'cannot take up a position *outside* of the relationship between divine cause and created effect), '...when a created intellect sees God's essence, that very essence becomes the form through which the intellect understands', (Aquinas 1964–1980, I.12.5, reply) or, as Aquinas puts it more fully in his conclusion to Article 2:

'God's essence is existence itself. So, as other intelligible forms, which are not identical with their existence, are united to the mind by means of a sort of mental existence by which they inform and actualize the mind, the divine essence is united to a created mind so as to be what is actually understood, and through its very self it causes the mind actually to understand' (Aquinas 1964–1980, I.12.2).

While recognised without question as 'Christian', and, increasingly, as 'Platonist', Aquinas is rarely referred to as a 'mystic' and yet, notwithstanding the unembellished prose in which he conveys his thoughts, it is important to remember that this paradigmatic 'schoolman' was also committed day-by-day to the *practice* of finding God in word and prayer. In the 'hidden' meaning of Ex. 3.14 Aquinas recognises the 'I am' at the heart of his own 'I am' and it is by this divine light, he says, that 'a creature becomes godlike' (Aquinas 1964–1980, I.12.5)—even if this process only begins here on earth. To see how this theme can start to break through the boundaries of medieval Christian orthodoxy, we will now turn to Thomas's Dominican confrere, Meister Eckhart, who goes beyond both Augustine and Aquinas since '...it is a question', as Zum Brunn puts it, 'for the Rhenish Dominican of "becoming God" by becoming being'. (Zum Brunn 1988, x.).

When it comes to Eckhart, we have reached the quintessential example of a Christian mystic influenced by Neoplatonism. In his *Book of the Parables of Genesis*, he explains that his aim is to '...bring to light the more hidden sense of some things contained in them [the parables of Genesis] in parabolic fashion "under the shell of the letter", <sup>47</sup> and he has no problem in using pagan philosophy to help him to do so. <sup>48</sup> In his reading of Ex. 3.14, Eckhart analyses each word in the *Ego sum qui sum*. <sup>49</sup> Echoing



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> The quotation taken from Augustine (1970) is from *De Trinitate* 9.11: 'A likeness of God comes to be in us when we know him'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> For a recent volume on these issues, see Blankenhorn 2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* II, n.1 in Colledge and McGinn 1981, p.92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> 'No one can be thought to understand the scriptures who does not know how to find its hidden marrow – Christ, the Truth...enclosed there [in its parables] are to be found the virtues and the principles of the sciences, the keys to metaphysics, physics and ethics, as well as the universal rules' Eckhart, *In Gen.* II, n.3, in Colledge and McGinn 1981, p.94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Eckhart, *In Exod.*, nn.14–15 in McGinn 1986, p.45–8.

Aquinas' first reason for seeing 'He who is' as the most appropriate divine name, Eckhart interprets the 'I' as 'pure substance' without reference to accident or form, and in absolute distinction from everything else which exists through him. While finite beings are a 'this or a that' (esse hoc et hoc) and defined by their not being something else, God is Being itself (esse simpliciter), distinct by virtue of his 'indistinction' from anything else. <sup>50</sup> In this way, where Augustine focussed on immutability and transcendence, and Aquinas on Existence as act, Eckhart underlines above all the unity and simplicity of the One. <sup>51</sup> In the 'AM', Eckhart sees the identity of existence and essence in the divine Being—the sui generis equivalence which is precisely what allows God to be both immanent in and transcendent to all created beings, both distinct and indistinct at the same time. Eckhart does not understand God as the 'totality of being(s)' in a pantheistic sense, but as 'Being'—which is, therefore, 'not-other' than any created being, but not identical with any one of those beings either:

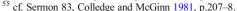
'The relationship of creative Being to created beings can only be articulated as a paradox: on the one hand, Being itself is the innermost Ground of the being and existence of creatures; it is, for that reason, what is most intimate in beings, is everywhere and "in" all things, and not distinct from anything...on the other hand and at the same time, however, it is "beyond" all beings, is no-thing and precisely as such the Ground of each thing'. (Beierwaltes 1972, p.61–2, my translation).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Eckhart explains the 'WHO' as a non-finite relative pronoun which gestures towards the open-ended and boundless substance of the divine Being.

The relation between creature and Creator for Eckhart is neither one of simple identity nor one of straightforward difference. In his Latin sermon on grace, it is possible to hear an echo of Ex. 3.14 when he says that it is 'by God's grace [that] I am what I am' (his rendering of 1 Cor.15:10)<sup>53</sup>—the pure being (*istichkeit*) in which we are enjoined to participate through grace in Christ and apart from which we are 'pure nothing'.<sup>54</sup> The more 'indistinct' we can become through material and spiritual detachment, the more we come to realise our non-difference from Being as such:

'When my "is" and "God's is", my "I am" and God's "I am" are one and the same "I am Who am", then there is one being, one knowing, and one working that is "greatly fruitful" like grace' (Dobie 2015, p.134–5).<sup>55</sup>

Sermon XXV, n.257, in McGinn 1986, p.218.
 Eckhart, cited in *In agro dominico* art.26: 'Omnes creaturae sunt unum purum nihil: non dico, quod sint quid modicum vel aliquid, sed quod sint unum purum nihil'. Colledge and McGinn 1981, p.80.





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> As Beierwaltes points out, the *Liber de Causis* was also an important influence on Eckhart, and the Dominican often cites Proposition 21 ('The First Cause is sufficient in itself and is the most sufficient') in support of his emphasis on God as *esse simpliciter* (cf. Beierwaltes 1972, p.40, n.158).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Als reine Substanz oder als reines Sein ist Gott Selbstgenugsamkeit, dives per se, "reich durch sich selbst", wie Eckhart immer wieder in Anlehnung an den neuplatonischen bestimmten Prinzip-Begriff des 'Liber de Causis' sagt'. Beierwaltes 1972, p.44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> 'Das Verhältnis des schaffenden Seins zum geschaffenen Seienden kann sprachlich nur paradox formuliert werden: Einmal ist das Sein selbst der innerste Existenz- und Wesens-Grund des Seienden; es ist deshalb 'zuinnerst' im Seienden, überall und 'in' allem, gerade nichts vom Seienden 'Unterschiedenes'...zum andern und zugleich aber ist es 'über' allem Seienden, ist nicht-Etwas und gerade so Grund eines jeden Etwas...'

In the 'hidden' meaning of the name revealed to Moses, Eckhart sees the key to mystical union with the source and ground of our existence. His arresting language of the 'nothingness' of created being, his distinction between God and the 'Godhead' beyond God,<sup>56</sup> and his statements regarding the 'birth of the Word in the soul'<sup>57</sup> which seem to blur the ontological distinction between creature and the Creator, display his indebtedness to Neoplatonic concepts (e.g. of a scale of being and a hyper-essential One), but arguably leave him teetering on the brink of Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, McGinn suggests that it cannot be merely coincidental that two of the three 'most systematic' Latin Neoplatonist Christian thinkers—John Scotus Eriugena and Eckhart himself—were both posthumously condemned by the Church for certain of their more provocative ideas:

'Such condemnations and suspicions seem to confirm the feeling that Neoplatonic thought is at best a problematic (and frequently an unhelpful) language for the expression of Christian theology' (McGinn in O'Meara 1982, p.128).<sup>58</sup>

The issue of how helpful or problematic Neoplatonic thought might be as a vehicle for expressing Christian theology is not one I intend to address explicitly, since my aim has been more modest—namely, to demonstrate its influence on several key Christian figures, especially in their reading of the 'I AM' of Ex.3.14. I have also sought to suggest, however, that there is, at the very least, a possible tension between Neoplatonic and Christian ontologies when it comes to the issue of how 'beings' are related to Being. <sup>59</sup> While Augustine and Aquinas manage to pull back from the brink of a thoroughgoing identity between creature and Creator by postponing any such mystical union until after death, <sup>60</sup> the language of conversion, participation and even transformation is evident in both of these paragons of orthodoxy. Eckhart is more daring in his imagery and conceptual vocabulary, and it is, therefore, not his mysticism or Neoplatonism which has come under suspicion, but the orthodoxy of his Christianity. Finally, I want to look at what happens when the mystical correlation of 'knowing' and 'being' is pushed to its logical limits by turning to a twentieth-century figure who saw himself as both a (Platonist) Christian, and as a (Hindu) Vedāntin.

### Henri Le Saux (1910-73)

Better known as Swami Abhishiktānanda, Henri Le Saux was a Benedictine monk who spent much of his life wrestling with the conceptual and spiritual attempt to reconcile

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Though, Augustine seems to have had a 'mystical' experience of union in a villa in Ostia.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> For a detailed examination of this supposed distinction in Eckhart, see McGinn 1981.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> See *In agro dominico*, art.22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Indeed, McGinn specifically points out that '[t]he majority of the twenty-eight propositions from his [Eckhart's] works condemned by Pope John XXII in the Bull "In agro dominico" of March 27, 1329, involve or imply aspects of his appropriation of Neoplatonism'. (129). The third Latin Neoplatonist McGinn has in mind (who was not condemned) is (Cardinal) Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> This tension can be explained partly by the Christian doctrine—not present in Neoplatonism—of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Christian theology with the non-dual (*advaita*) philosophy of Vedāntic Hinduism—a struggle which can be seen in microcosm in his treatment of Ex. 3.14.<sup>61</sup>

Like the Platonist-influenced Christians we have discussed so far, Le Saux's first move is to identify the search for the Ground of Being with the search for God:

'To every problem with which the  $j\tilde{n}\tilde{a}n\bar{t}$  is faced, to every metaphysic with which he is confronted, he replies by asking the simple question: "Do you, or do you not, admit the fact of Being? If there is Being, then who or what could qualify it?" This was long ago the theme of the famous poem of Parmenides at the dawn of Greek philosophy, shortly after the rishis on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus had themselves also heard in the depths of their spirit the *upaniṣad* of Being and Brahman. Reason may discuss, but experience knows'. (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.44).<sup>62</sup>

We can already begin to see from this passage why it may be unhelpful to ask whether Le Saux was *primarily* influenced by (Neo)-Platonism or Vedānta, since, like W. Jones two centuries earlier, he is identifying a common thread running between the traditions owing to their shared onto-theological characterisation of the divine Being. He is also influenced by all three of the figures we have looked at, sometimes even naming them explicitly. Like Augustine, he emphasises the immutability and eternity of the God revealed to Moses on Mount Horeb and the Indic sages in the Himalaya:

'He who *is*—beyond all such manifestations—can never change or disappear. He remains forever because *he is*. Once the realization that "*I am*" has dawned upon a man, he lives from then on at a level of awareness that no threat of extinction can ever touch'. (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.24).

Like Aquinas, he explains knowledge of God as a kind of 'connaturality', 63 and, like Eckhart, he recognises the indistinct and limitless simplicity of God-Being:

'It is precisely because God is beyond form, that he is also behind and within every form; because he is formless, *a-rūpa*, he can be recognised and worshipped under every kind of form, *sarva-rūpa*. He is both the *Unnameable* and the possessor of *every name*, as in the hymn of Gregory of Nazianzen. There is nothing that does not manifest God to the soul which is open to him in a deep awareness of itself, and at the same time, there is nothing which, in revealing him, does not point to his being inexorably *beyond*'. (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.4–5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> 'Only when man realizes that he himself is an inscrutable mystery – that is, that his true being lies beyond any thought or consciousness that he may have of himself – only then can he discover in the depths of his experience the inscrutable mystery of God. Man's unknowable being is of the same order as God's, for man comes from God and has been created in his image. His is the 'beyond all' of Being itself'. Abhishiktananda 1974, p.4 (referring to Aquinas 1964–1980, II-II, 45, 2).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> For an autobiographical account of his efforts at living a more inculturated form of Indian Christianity, see Monchanin and Abhishiktananda 1964, and for the standard biographical account of his life, see Du Boulay 2005.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> By *upaniṣad* here, he means a correspondence or even 'mystical correlation': 'The fundamental *upaniṣad* of the Hindu experience is between *self* and *being*, between *the individual* and *the all*, between *ātman* and *brahman*, the formula which unfolds the ultimate secret of being…' (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.44, n.3).

Where he pushes the insights of his Christian predecessors to a logical extreme, however, is in rejecting what he sees as a misplaced Christian reluctance—evident in Augustine and Aquinas, though perhaps less so in Eckhart—to fully embrace the 'not-otherness' (*advaita*) of creature and Creator entailed (as he thought) by the correlation between God and Being, and to stubbornly keep seeking for a distinct place from where one's 'I' can contemplate God's 'Thou':

"...even the remotest and most inaccessible "caverns" of his heart turn out to be occupied already, and the darkness in which he had hoped to save his personal existence from annihilation in Being is already ablaze with the glory of God. He still struggles desperately to utter an *I*, a *Thou*; but now no sound makes itself heard, for *where* indeed could it come from? And even if by some means this *I* were to be pronounced, it would immediately be submerged in the one I AM that fills eternity...' (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.63).

This is the fundamental challenge that *advaita* Vedanta—and certain forms of Neoplatonism—present to Christian theology: if all is Being and anything other than or 'outside' Being is pure nothingness, it becomes difficult to see how there can be any real encounter in an ultimate sense between my 'I am' and God's 'I am'. Indeed, significant figures within Vedāntic traditions have seen this 'not-otherness' between creature and Creator as the obvious meaning of the Exodus verse upon which we have been concentrating. The well-known twentieth century Advaitin, Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), claimed that the whole of Vedānta is contained in two biblical passages: 'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps. 46:10) and 'I am that I am' (Friesen 2015, p.35). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that Ramana based his own spiritual teaching on the search for self-knowledge and self-realisation—enigmatically encouraging enquiring disciples to return to the source of their spiritual questions and reflect on the nature and identity of the 'I' who is asking them. Abhishiktānanda expresses this conclusion powerfully:

'Once the Absolute is met, there is no firm ground on which man might try to keep his balance. Once in contact with Being, all that dares to claim that it has a share in Being falls into nothingness, or rather disappears into Being itself. When the Self shines forth, the I that has dared to approach can no longer recognize its own self or preserve its own identity in the midst of that blinding light. It has so to speak vanished from its own sight. Who is left to *be*, in the presence of Being itself? The claim of Being is absolute...All the later developments of the Covenant religion – doctrines, laws and worship – are simply met by the advaitin with the word originally revealed to Moses on Mount Horeb: I am that I am'. (Abhishiktananda 1974, p.45).

#### Conclusion

While it might seem like a long and circuitous route to travel from Egypt to India, via Mount Horeb, we have seen that the holy ground of Moses's encounter with God at the



burning bush provides us with fertile soil for exploring the connections between two great philosophical traditions of the ancient world. Scholars have long been fascinated by perceived similarities between the Neoplatonism which flourished in the early centuries of the Common Era in Alexandria and the Sanskritic wisdom of the Upanisads. Whether common themes are the result of actual historical borrowings or cross-fertilisation is a difficult question to answer, and we have not sought to take a position on this either way. What I have argued, however, is that certain resonant parallels run deep and are far more than merely superficial connections between the two systems. In particular, we have explored the implications of a metaphysics of ontological non-dualism between the many and the One based, in both Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedānta, on an identification of the Absolute with Being as such. While other studies have concentrated on fine-grained examinations of commonalities and divergences, I have looked at these broad comparative questions through the prism of a single verse in the Hebrew scriptures and its long interpretation history. The divine 'I AM' of Ex. 3.14 has been drawn on by both Christians and Vedantins in support of a particular understanding of the relation between God (Being) and world (beings). Indeed, in his seminal comparative study of mysticism 'east' and 'west', Rudolf Otto draws specifically on Ex. 3.14 in order to substantiate his case that Śarinkara and Eckhart, while separated by time and geography, were nevertheless working with 'an almost identical metaphysic' (Otto 1932, p.4). It is a metaphysic found in Neoplatonism and Vedanta which identifies God with Being, and Being with God, without determination or distinction, and which thus accords ontological priority to the One over the many. This is why Otto can claim that Eckhart, no less than Samkara, could take the sixth chapter of the Chandogya Upanisad as his starting-point: 'Being only was this in the beginning, one only without a second' (Otto 1932, p.4).<sup>64</sup> It is also a metaphysic which is present, if perhaps underemphasised, in certain dimensions of the Christian traditions—as we have seen in Augustine, Aquinas, Eckhart and Abhishiktānanda. These four thinkers have provided us with interpretations of Ex. 3.14 which allow us to see the common onto-theological thread between Neoplatonism and Advaita Vedānta. While Augustine and Aquinas teeter on the edge of a full-blooded non-dualism between creature and Creator, Eckhart and Abhishiktānanda follow through the implications of Neoplatonic and Vedāntic metaphysics to their logical conclusion—we know God by recognising that we are-not-other-than God. The differences we have seen in the four figures we have looked at result not primarily from differences between Neoplatonism and Vedānta, but from differences between the ontological relation of a-dvaita between the One and the many to which both of these systems point and the distinction between God and creature which Christianity wants to maintain. As McGinn has noted, the fact that Christians who have embraced the consequences of Neoplatonism, such as Eriugena and Eckhart, have had their orthodox credentials put under question, suggests that there are points at which Christian doctrine diverges from Neoplatonic metaphysics. The same could be said, mutatis mutandis, for the attempts of figures like Swami Abhishiktānanda to assimilate Christian belief with the philosophical tenets of Vedānta. If we see a certain Christian emphasis on 'distinction' as our 'control' in this conceptual experiment, however, the fact that both Neoplatonism and Vedānta result in similar tensions lends support to the conclusion: that there are indeed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> From Chāndogya 6.2.1: sat eva idam agre āsīt ekam eva advitīyam.



deep conceptual parallels between these forms of Greek and Indian idealisms—and this may be even more startling if they are *not* the result of actual historical interactions, for then they would point to what Otto recognised as '...an astonishing conformity in the deepest impulses of human spiritual experience, which—because it is almost entirely independent of race, clime and age—points to an ultimate inward hidden similarity of the human spirit...' (Otto 1932, v).

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>.

#### References

Abhishiktananda, S. (1974). Saccidānanda: a Christian approach to advaitic experience. Delhi: ISPCK.

App, U. (2009). William Jones's ancient theology. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Aquinas, T. (1964–1980). Summa Theologiae. Blackfriars edition. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, and New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Augustine. (1970). *The Trinity*. McKenna, Stephen (trans.). Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press.

Augustine. (1979). In P. Schaff (Ed.), Expositions on the Book of Psalms. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. Augustine. (2008). Confessions, Chadwick, Henry (trans.). Oxford: OUP.

Beierwaltes, W. (1972). Platonismus und idealismus. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Blankenhorn, O. P. B. (2015). *The mystery of union with god: Dionysian mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas*. Washington, D. C: Catholic University of America Press.

Boland, V. (1996). Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas. New York: E.J. Brill.

Bouyer, L. (1980). Mysticism: An essay on the history of the word. In R. Woods (Ed.), *Understanding mysticism* (pp. 42–55). Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image Books.

Cannon, G. H. (Ed.). (1970). The letters of Sir William Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Clarke, W. N. (2009). The creative retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic philosophy, new and old. New York: Fordham University Press.

Colledge, E., & McGinn, B. (Eds.). (1981). Meister Eckhart: The essential sermons, commentaries, treatises and defence. London: Paulist Press.

Coxon, A. H., & McKirahan, R. (Ed. and Trans.) (2009). The fragments of parmenides. A critical text with introduction and translation, the ancient testimonia and a commentary. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing.

Dobie, R. J. (2015). Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart on Exodus 3:14: exegesis or eisegesis? Medieval Mystical Theology, 24(2), 124–136.

Du Boulay, S. (2005). The cave of the heart: The life of Swami Abhishiktananda. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books.

Friesen, J. G. (2015). Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux): Christian Nondualism and Hindu Advaita. Calgary, Alberta: Aevum Books.

Gregorios, P. (2002). *Neoplatonism and Indian philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Grimes, J. A. (2004). *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya Bhagavatpāda: an introduction and translation*. Aldershot, UK, Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Guagliardo, V. A., Hess C. R., & Taylor, R. C., trans. (1996). Commentary on the Book of Causes/St. Thomas Aquinas. Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Hacker, P. (1995). Cit and nous, or the concept of Spirit in Vedantism and Neoplatonism. In W. Halbfass (Ed.), Philology and confrontation: Paul Hacker on traditional and modern Vedānta (pp. 211–226). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.



Harris, R. B. (Ed.). (1981). *Neoplatonism and Indian thought*. Virginia: State University of New York Press. Hick, J. (1999). *The fifth dimension*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Just, M. (2013). Neoplatonism and paramadvaita. Comparative Philosophy, 4(2) Article 6.

Kopf, D. (1969). British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The dynamics of Indian modernization 1773–1835. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lott, E. J. (1980). Vedantic approaches to God. Macmillan: Library of Philosophy and Religion. London.

Malkovsky, B. (2001). The role of divine grace in the soteriology of Sankaracarya. Leiden: Brill.

Max-Müller, F. (1919). The six systems of Indian philosophy. Varanasi: Vidya Vilas Press and London: Longmans, Green and Co.

McGinn, B. (1981). The God beyond God: theology and mysticism in the thought of Meister Eckhart. *The Journal of Religion*, 61, 1–19.

McGinn, B. (Ed.). (1986). Meister Eckhart, teacher and preacher. New York: Paulist Press.

McGinn, B. (1991). The foundations of mysticism. London: SCM.

Monchanin, J., & Abhishiktananda. (1964). A Benedictine Ashram. Douglas, Isle of Man: Times Press.

O'Meara, D. J. (Ed.). (1982). Neoplatonism and Christian thought. Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Rourke, F. (2005). Pseudo-Dionysius and the metaphysics of Aquinas. ND: University of Notre Dame Press.

Otto, R. (1932). Mysticism east and west: a comparative analysis of the nature of mysticism. London: Macmillan and Co..

Pandey, U. (2015). Śankara: a realist philosopher. Jalandhar: Kautilya Prakashan.

Perl, E. (2014). Thinking being: introduction to metaphysics in the classical tradition. Leiden; Boston: BRILL. Plotinus. (1984/1988). Ennead V and VI (Loeb). Trans. A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard and London: Heinemann.

Soskice, J. (2014). Aquinas and Augustine on creation and god as "eternal being". *New Blackfriars*, 95(1056), 190–207.

Staal, J. F. (1961). Advaita and Neoplatonism: a critical study in comparative philosophy. University of Madras.

Zum Brunn, É. (1988). St. Augustine: Being and nothingness. New York: Paragon House.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.







Article

# Transcendence as Indistinction in Eckhart and Heidegger

# Bradley B. Onishi

Religious Studies Department, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, USA; bonishi@skidmore.edu

Academic Editor: Justin Sands

Received: 8 November 2016; Accepted: 7 March 2017; Published: 5 April 2017

Abstract: I examine what I call Eckhart's doctrine of indistinction as a precursor to Heidegger's approach to the worldhood of the world. Taking cues from textual evidence in various sections of Heidegger's texts and lecture courses, I demonstrate that Heidegger's ontology is at least partially inherited from Eckhart's henology. As a result, there is an analogous logic of indistinction operative in Eckhart's understanding of the relationship between God and creation, and the inseparability of Dasein and the world in Heidegger's phenomenology. I conclude by suggesting that Heidegger's reading of Eckhart is a microcosm of the relationship between continental philosophy and religion, because it demonstrates that turning one's eyes to the logics of a different cosmology, anthropology, or ontology, may permit the eyes to see more fully what is at play in one's own approach to the human, the world, and the relationship between them. In other words, the secular often illuminates theological blind spots, just as the theological has the power to transform, enlarge, or supplement the secular view of the consciously secular thinker, without converting philosophy to theology or vice versa.

**Keywords:** Heidegger; Eckhart; indistinction; philosophy of religion; phenomenology; henology; worldhood of the world; ontotheology

### 1. Introduction

Diverging from a long list of theological predecessors, including his fellow Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart understands creatures as pure nothing. For Eckhart, creatures are not beings that participate poorly in Being, nor is their final cause to fully accord themselves to Being. Rather, the final cause of creatures is to-be as beings. God enables their existence by perpetually conferring existence upon them—by giving birth to their possibility in each instant. Their perpetual reception of the loan of Being is the reception of the possibility of their possibilities. Thus, Eckhart does not understand existence on the basis of a final telos toward which all things move. Instead, his ontology posits the perpetual birth of the possibility of creatures through the immediate givenness of God.

In a manner that echoes of Eckhart's henology, through his sweeping analysis of time and temporality, Heidegger posits that in relation to Being, Dasein is nothing in-itself. For Heidegger, temporality enables the birth of the possibility of Dasein's possibilities, its world. Hence, Dasein, like the Eckhartian creature, is a nullity that is given Being without ever having it in-itself. According to Eckhart, God is the Always Moving Immovable, who is the condition and constitution of existence. God "is" God by giving Himself to creatures as the possibility of their possibilities. According to Heidegger, temporality is the "original outside-itself itself" that gives birth to Dasein's world as its condition and constitution. Temporality gives birth to Dasein's possibility by enabling the worlding of its world. Thus, along Eckhartian lines, in conjunction with his own reading of temporality as the transcendental-horizon of Dasein's world, Heidegger concludes that Dasein's mode of Being is never to have its Being. Dasein's mode of "presence," both to itself and to other beings, is to never-be-present.

Religions 2017, 8, 56 2 of 12

In what follows, I examine what I call Eckhart's doctrine of indistinction as a precursor to Heidegger's approach to the worldhood of the world. Taking cues from textual evidence in various sections of Heidegger's texts and lecture courses, I demonstrate that Heidegger's ontology is at least partially inherited from Eckhart's henology. As a result, there is an analogous logic of indistinction operative in Eckhart's understanding of the relationship between God and creation, and the inseparability of Dasein and the world in Heidegger's phenomenology.

# 2. Meister Eckhart's Doctrine of Indistinction: From "God is Being" to "Existence itself is God"

For Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart's Dominican brother and predecessor, all creatures share in Being, since nothing is more formal or simple than Being. God's Being is identical to his essence, because God has the whole power of Being, and thus God is Being itself. Consequently, Thomas's metaphysics is predicated on the notion that "God is Being."

In his commentary on *Exodus*, Eckhart changes God is Being to "Esse autem ipsum deus est" ["Existence itself is God"] (Eckhart 1936, p. 36; Eckhart 1986a, p. 51). The change is subtle, but fundamental. According to Thomas's "God is Being," God is everything included in Being, and more. Despite his ontological otherness from creatures as "proper Being," in terms of his relation to creatures, He is perfect because He contains all the perfections of Being. Finite Being is a dim share of the fullness of God's infinite Being. In contrast, Eckhart's "Existence itself is God", seemingly reduces God to the common Being of creatures. Here, Existence is the subject of the sentence, and God stands in the appositive as an adjectival noun. According to Eckhart, Being is not how one describes God; God is how one describes Existence. Yet, in Eckhart's reading, far from degrading God by reducing him to the level of creaturely existence, this change illuminates the absolute difference between God and creatures.

In his commentary on the *Book of Wisdom*, Eckhart makes sure that his readers understand that "is" and "existence" "signify the same thing, though as different parts of speech." Thus, strictly speaking, God is the "is" in every existential statement. Every predication of any creature contains within it a reference to the God who is Existence, as Robert Dobie states in an analysis of Eckhart's philosophy of religion: "But if we understand the true existential import of the copula 'is', we must assert that 'is' refers properly to God. For 'is' refers to what is beyond and prior to every 'this or that'—that is, every finite being or creature." (Dobie 2002, p. 575) In contrast to Aquinas, Eckhart highlights that, when one makes a statement about a created substance, such as "Socrates is a human," the "is" in the predicate-copula does not refer to the Being of Socrates. The "is" of this sentence refers to God, who is the very possibility of not only Socrates in particular and the idea of humanity in general, but also the predication between them. Neither the idea of humanity, nor Socrates, participate in the Being of God, but instead, they both exist because God is the "is" that enables existence, prior to all predication of one creature to another.

In this way, Eckhart's reversal of "God is Being" to "Existence itself is God" transforms God from the Being who is pure actuality without potency, into what Bernard McGinn calls "pure possibility" (McGinn 2005, p. 131). According to Thomas Aquinas, because God's essence is His existence, there is no potency for change in God. God's actuality is his existential reality. Further, the identity of God's actual Being with his existential Being forms the foundation of the final cause of all creatures, which strives to unify their existence with their prototypical image—their reality—as produced by God, before the creation of the world. By contrast, Eckhart says that God's very essence *is* existence: "Esse est deus per essentiam" ["Existence is the very essence of God"] (Eckhart 1936, p. 37; Eckhart 1974, p. 91). Eckhart's reversal of the fundamental principle of Thomistic metaphysics means that God is the

All references to Eckhart's work include reference to the original Latin or German text, followed reference to the English translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 340); "Commentary on the Book of Wisdom 1:14," in (McGinn 1986, p. 147).

Religions 2017, 8, 56 3 of 12

possibility of the possibility of all creatures, rather than the act of Being, that by definition, excludes all potency.

Through this reversal, Eckhart has laid the basis for transforming Thomas's doctrine of participation into a doctrine of indistinction. Thomas understands that all beings participate in Being. Created substances have Being in varying degrees, and thus poorly imitate the perfections of God, who has the whole power of Being. In Eckhart's reading, God is not present in beings through a hierarchy of created substances that more or less participate in the Divine Substance: "With his whole being God is present whole and entire as much in the least thing as in the greatest." (Eckhart 1936, p. 94; Eckhart 1986a, p. 75) According to Eckhart, Existence is foreign to no being because it is the condition for existence—the esse enables the ens. Consequently, if Existence is God, God gives himself to all creatures equally: "All things possess existence immediately and equally from God alone." (Eckhart 1936, p. 77; Eckhart 1991, p. 90) In terms of intimacy with God, there is no distinction between lower and higher, noble and common. All beings receive their existence immediately and equally from God. This accords with what Eckhart says in his German sermon Omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum est: "The nobler things are, the more widespread and common they are." (Eckhart 1986b, p. 249) Eckhart maintains that God's Oneness logically means that God is "united and is in all things under the covering of the One, and vice versa under the One's covering and property each thing grasps God." Eckhart's shift from participation to indistinct immediacy means that, unlike Thomas, he does not believe that there are created substances that have Being in themselves. Every being, from the smallest gnat to the human intellect, receives existence totally from God, which means that "Existence always stands in the One; multiplicity as such does not exist." God confers existence upon creatures immediately, without an intermediary stage, which means that in strict ontological terms, there can be no ontological multiplicity.

In Eckhart's view, the Oneness of God signifies His perfection because, as the Indistinct, God is wholly united to every creature as the possibility of its existence and yet wholly dissimilar from every creature as distinctly indistinct. God's perfection is posited through a collapse of the distance between Creator and creatures, that ultimately reveals the ontological gap between them. An analysis of the three paradoxical theses of the doctrine of indistinction highlights this point: "You should know that nothing is as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature. In the second place, nothing is as similar as the Creator and any creature. And in the third place, nothing is as equally dissimilar and similar to anything else as God and the creature are dissimilar and similar in the same degree." (Eckhart 1936, p. 110; Eckhart 1986a, p. 81).

In the first thesis, Eckhart asserts that Creator and creature are separated by the widest possible ontological gap. Despite his daring formulation of God as indistinct from creation, he is clear that God and creatures are somehow differentiated by their mode of Being. God is infinite and thus "not determined by the confines or limits of any genera or beings." On the other hand, creatures are precisely determined and finite because they are created: "By the fact that something is created, it is distinct and is unequal and many. By its descent from the One and the Indistinct the created thing falls from this One into indistinction and hence into inequality." Thus, God and creature are distinguished by the very fact that created beings are themselves distinct: "But God is indistinct from every being, just as Existence Itself is indistinct from any being, as said above. But everything created, by the very fact that it is created, is distinct." (Eckhart 1936, p. 110; Eckhart 1986a, p. 81) If to be One is to be infinitely and limitlessly united to all things, to be created is to be limited and finite, and therefore, distinct from other beings and from the Indistinct itself. The dissimilarity of God and creatures is rooted in God's indistinction from creation, since "the indistinct is more distinguished from the distinct than

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 443); Wisdom 7:11, (McGinn 1986, p. 160).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 443); Wisdom 7:11, (McGinn 1986, p. 160–61).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 482); Wisdom 7:27a, (McGinn 1986, p. 166).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 359); Wisdom 1:14, (McGinn 1986, p. 154).

Religions 2017, 8, 56 4 of 12

any two distinct two things are from each other...But indistinction belongs to God's nature; distinction to the created thing's nature and idea, as we said above. Therefore, God is more distinct from each and every created thing." God is more distinct from any being, precisely because He is indistinct from all things. Nothing is more dissimilar to a being than that which is not a being, precisely because it is indistinguishable from all beings. In contrast to Thomas, Eckhart understands the utter lack of distinction between God and creature to signify the ontological *difference* between them. Indistinction distinguishes God as wholly other to the creature.

According to the second thesis, nothing is more similar than God is to creatures. Is this not a direct contradiction of the first thesis? How does Eckhart explain this paradox? According to the first thesis, God is distinct from all creatures through his indistinction; God is distinct because He is indistinct. According to the second thesis, nothing is as similar than God and creatures, because outside of the One, there is nothing. Thus, outside of God, a being is not a being; it is nothing: "Every created being taken or conceived apart as distinct in itself from God is not a being, but is nothing. What is separate and distinct from God is separate and distinct from existence." (Eckhart 1936, p. 45; Eckhart 1986a, p. 55) If the first thesis of the doctrine of indistinction reveals the ontological difference between creature and Creator by eradicating their distinction, the second thesis posits the radical nothingness of all creatures outside of God. By contrast to Thomas's doctrine of participation, the doctrine of indistinction posits that created things have no Being in themselves whatsoever: "Nothing is as similar as God and the creature. What is as similar to something else as that which possesses and receives its total existence from the order and relation it has to something else, a thing whose total act of existence is drawn from this other and has this as an exemplar? But this is the way the creature is related to God..." (Eckhart 1936, p. 111; Eckhart 1986a, p. 82) Eckhart follows both Augustine and Boethius by positing the radical nothingness of creatures in themselves. Apart from Existence, all things are nothing: "It is evident that everything created is nothing of itself. 'He created them that they might be,' and prior to existence there is nothing. Therefore, whoever loves a creature loves nothing and becomes nothing, because love transforms the lover into the beloved."8 In Eckhart's mind, God and creature are more similar than any creature is to another creature, because every creature receives its existence totally and perpetually from God. Creatures "are", only because they receive Existence. Every creature is more similar to God than any other creature, since it exists only through God.

The third and final thesis is the synthesis of the first two: "nothing is both as dissimilar and similar to anything else as God and the creature." According to the second thesis, creatures are more similar to God than anything else, because they are totally dependent upon Him for their Being. Beings have no degree of Being in themselves, and thus apart from the perpetual reception of existence, they are nothing. Yet according to the first thesis, nothing is more dissimilar than God and creatures, because God is ontologically distinguished from any creature by his indistinction from all things. It seems that, for Eckhart, when it comes to God and creatures, similarity is always dissimilarity: "to be similar to God is also to be more dissimilar...The more ways that something is like God, the more it is unlike him." (Eckhart 1936, pp. 112–13; Eckhart 1986a, pp. 82–83) Eckhart's henology apophatically strips the attributes of God so that it is impossible to represent God as an object of thought. God is not a sum total of perfections, a collection of divine attributes, or even the infinitely infinite other about whom human speech can only say what He is not. Instead, Existence itself is God, the distinctly indistinct Unity of all things, outside of which there is nothing. Hence, to posit a creature as similar to God means to posit the indistinction of the creature from God. Yet, far from signifying an ontological

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> (Eckhart 1936, pp. 489–90); Wisdom 7:27a, (McGinn 1986, p. 169).

<sup>8 (</sup>Eckhart 1936, pp. 354–55); Wisdom 1:14, (McGinn 1986, p. 153).

Dobie highlights this point helpfully, "As the presupposition of all thought, God is what is most known to us; but precisely because God never enters into our thought as an object of thought, God is also what is most hidden to us. It is analogous to human self-knowledge: there is nothing we know so well and so poorly as what is closest to us." (Dobie 2002, p. 573).

Religions 2017, 8, 56 5 of 12

similarity between Creator and created, indistinction signifies the total ontological dissimilarity of God and creature:

Therefore, nothing is as indistinct as the one God or Unity and the numbered created thing... Nothing is as indistinct from anything as from that from which it is indistinguished by its own distinction. But everything that is numbered or created is indistinguished from God by its own distinction, as said above. Therefore, nothing is so indistinct and consequently one, for the indistinct and the One are the same.<sup>10</sup>

God is not perfect because He has the whole power of Being. God's perfection is strictly about his oneness. God is indistinctly distinguished and distinctly indistinguishable from all things, and is ontologically separated from creatures through a relation of absolute ontological dependence.

Instead of conceiving God as the Unmoved Mover who causes all things without being influenced by them, for Eckhart, God is the *Always Moving Immovable* that gives Himself to all creatures, high and low (Eckhart 1936, p. 43; Eckhart 1986a, p. 54). The creature as an accident can only exist through the existence of the one Divine Substance, which itself, is the always moving pure possibility of existence: "Outside of existence, and without existence, everything is nothing, even what has been made." (Eckhart 1936, p. 53; Eckhart 1974, p. 102) There is no reality or perfection in creatures—they "are", only because of God's giving. The Being of beings is always received and in the process of being received as a loan.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. A Worldly Mystic: Heidegger's Early Engagement with Meister Eckhart

After finishing his dissertation on Duns Scotus in 1916, Heidegger developed his truly distinct philosophical voice by diverging from Neo-Kantian epistemology and ontology through a search for the transcendent ground of experience, as the Harvard historian Peter Gordon summarizes: "It is this theme above all—the rejection of ontological *pluralism* and the assertion of an ontological *unity* deeper than any particular object domains—that most reveals the early Heidegger's departure from the methodological consensus of Neo-Kantianism." (Gordon 2010, p. 63) During the years after his doctoral work (1917–1919), Heidegger recorded a number of notes on medieval mysticism, some of which were intended to be used in a course on the same topic in 1919. These notes mark the beginning of the shift in Heidegger's thinking, that would lead to his break with the notion that philosophy's goal is to construct a comprehensive worldview.

Despite the fact that the course was eventually canceled, the notes reflect a thinker who understood certain medieval mystics to be an invaluable resource for understanding the transcendent ground of factical life (see (Kisiel 2010, pp. 309–28)). More specifically, the notes reveal that medieval mysticism reflected, to Heidegger, how a primordial ontological *transcendent*—what he calls at times the Absolute, the ground of the soul, or the unrestricted unity—enables the stream of human experience to be experienced as a relational whole. Heidegger specifically engaged Meister Eckhart in order to understand how a transcendent ground grounds human experience, but not as a foundational First Principle. Rather, he developed the notion of "world," coupled with Dasein's mortal temporality, as the key to understanding the ontological unity of all beings. Overall, Heidegger's notes on mysticism are the earliest explorations of how a non-metaphysical and pre-cognitive ground governs the self's experience of other beings and itself.

Heidegger realizes that if experience is conditioned by a primordial ontological unity that gives the flow of the stream of experience, the formulation of this unity is intimately related to the formulation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>.0</sup> (Eckhart 1936, p. 491); Wisdom 18:14–15, (McGinn 1986, p. 170).

<sup>(</sup>Eckhart 1936, p. 35); (Eckhart 1974, p. 89): "So God created all things not like other craftsmen, so that they stand outside of himself, or beside himself, or apart from himself. Rather he called them out of nothingness, that is from non-existence to existence, so that they might find and receive and have it in him; for he himself is existence."

Religions 2017, 8, 56 6 of 12

of transcendence. Heidegger's concern with experience centers on that which transcends Dasein, so as to ground it. This is reflected in one of the notes inexplicably omitted from the *Gesamtausgabe*:

'Living experience' as the sphere of life as such is however not expanded and regarded fundamentally by way of an absolute primal science of experience, but rather proceeds to transcendences regarded as a formal ontological lawfulness—an *eidetic*—which somehow possesses the absolute givenness in-itself common to the absolute sphere of lived experience; a transcendent absolute theoretical science: world of ideas in God. (Cited in (Kisiel 2010, p. 317))

This "absolute givenness" is distinct from the epistemological categories formulated by Kant. Heidegger is not looking for a map of the categories that structure the self's experience of different kinds of objects. He is trying to understand the givenness of beings as a whole, according to their ontological ground.

Heidegger finds, in mystical ontologies such as Eckhart's, on whose theology he comments here, a means for understanding the self's pre-cognitive and pre-reflective experience of the world: "Elimination of all chance, multiplicity, time. Absoluteness of object and subject in the sense of radical unity and as such unity of both: I am it, and it is I."12 It is not difficult to detect echoes of Eckhart's doctrine of indistinction in Heidegger's thought. His interest in the ontological unity of all beings has led him to notice how Eckhart posits the radical unity of the self with the transcendent absolute—Eckhart's indistinct God: "From this the namelessness of God and ground of the soul. In this sphere, no opposition—and therefore the problem of the precedence of *intellectus* [intellect] or *voluntas* [will] no longer belong to this sphere." (Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 316; Heidegger 2010, p. 240) For Heidegger, Eckhart's henology frees epistemology from the endless debates about the nature of the categories and their relation to the rational ego. By contrast, the ontological ground is so radically immanent to the soul that it transcends the soul as the indeterminate Absolute: "Not the not-yet-determinable and not-yet-determined—rather, that which is essentially without determination in general is the primordial object, the absolute." <sup>13</sup> Thus, the absolute sphere of lived-experience—that is, the sphere of experience taken as a whole without regional demarcations that divide "life" into different epistemological or ontological domains—is governed by the indeterminable givenness of the Absolute.

Accordingly, Heidegger realizes that, within Eckhart's schema, the ontological primacy of the Absolute as the transcendently immanent ground of experience prevented Eckhart from having to posit the ground of the soul in opposition to the intellect: "Eckhart is not in favor of theoretical reason as juxtaposed to the will, but rather of the primacy of the soul's ground, which is, mystical-theoretically, ranked above both." (Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 318; Heidegger 2010, p. 241) The Absolute transcendent, which is radically unified with the "I," has ontological primacy over the intellect or the will. Even when the self is unaware of the ground or lacks understanding of it, the ground always already functions as that which enables the self's possibility.

In this light, it is not surprising that in the 1927 lecture course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger singles out the Dominican as an exception to the logic of production, wherein beings must accord themselves with a *prima causa* being which is Being itself, endemic to the history of Western thought. He suggests that Meister Eckhart's ontology eschews the logic of knowing and seeing, because of the way in which he transforms the notion of a ground. That is, Eckhart does not understand God to be the being whose "essence is his existence," and thus the being who is

<sup>(</sup>Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 316); (Heidegger 2010, p. 240): "Ausschaltung jeder Veränderung, Vielheit, Ziet. Absolutheit von Objekt und Subjekt im Sinne radikaler Einheit und als solche Einheit beider: ich bin es, und es ist ich." All references to Heidegger's work list the standard Gesamtausgabe (GA) German edition, followed by reference to the English translation.

<sup>13 (</sup>Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 316); (Heidegger 2010, p. 240): "Nicht das Noch-nicht-Bestimmbare und Noch-nicht-Bestimmte, sondern das wesentlich überhaupt Bestimmungslose als solches ist Urgegenstand, Absolutes."

Religions **2017**, *8*, 56

pure actuality without any possibility. In Heidegger's reading, Eckhart's mysticism transformed the idea of essence, and thus provides a peculiar understanding of the relation between Being and beings: "In this attempt mysticism arrives at a peculiar speculation, peculiar because it transforms the idea of essence in general, which is an ontological determination of a being...into a being and makes the ontological ground of a being, its possibility, its essence, into what is properly actual." (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 127; Heidegger 1982, p. 90) For Eckhart, the "ontological determination of a being" is understood as "its possibility." The ontological ground of a being is that which enables its possibilities, rather than that which produces an image of its actuality. Heidegger goes on to point out that, according to Eckhart's mysticism, God refuses "every existential determination" (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, pp. 127–28; Heidegger 1982, p. 90). In Heidegger's reading of Eckhart, God is not the supreme Being who founds all beings, because in strict terms, God does not "exist." The ground of all possibility is not the foundation of beings, but "the purest indeterminate possibility of everything possible, pure nothing. He is the nothing over against the concept of every creature, over against every determinate possible and actualized being." (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 128; Heidegger 1982, p. 91). <sup>14</sup>

According to Heidegger, Eckhart was not interested in God as the necessary and perfect First Being, but in Godhead, which is "the essence—the essence to which, as it were, every existential determination must still be refused." As sketched out in the previous chapter, for Eckhart, God does not exist—God is the possibility of all possibility. According to Heidegger, Eckhart's interest in "Godhead" signifies that God is not the Highest Being that produces all beings, but "pure nothing," because He is "the most universal being, the purest indeterminate possibility of everything possible." He reads in Eckhart an understanding of the ontological constitution of beings by a ground that is "pure possibility," instead of a ground of Being that is pure actuality without possibility.

Heidegger concludes that the experience of the world as a meaningful whole reflects the inherent religiosity of the self's experience of the world, as he expresses in a comment on Schleiermacher's approach to religion: "Religion is the specifically religiously intentional, emotional reference of each content of experience to an infinite whole as fundamental meaning." (Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 321; Heidegger 2010, p. 243) His reference to an infinite whole as fundamental meaning is not meant to convey a metaphysical foundation for making sense of the self's experience of the world. Instead, he is interested in expressing how the "unrestricted unity" that shapes religious experience in the work of Meister Eckhart, Bernard of Clairvaux, and even Friedrich Schleiermacher, is analogous to the ground from which Dasein is held, even when it has no cognitive understanding or recognition of it. He was struck by how the "immediacy of religious experience" reveals covered-over elements of "the vivacity of experience [Erlebnislebendigkeit]" (Heidegger 1975a, GA 60, p. 315; Heidegger 2010, p. 239). This ground constitutes a primordial unity to the self's experience of the world.

# 4. Indistinction as Transcendence: The Worlding of the World

Heidegger develops the insight gleaned from Eckhart and other religious figures in his 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground," in order to phenomenologically reformulate the theme of transcendence. In this essay, Heidegger is clear that transcendence means "surpassing": "as a 'relation' that passes 'from' something 'to' something" (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 137; Heidegger 1998, p. 107). This includes three basic elements: a "toward which," which is the goal of the surpassing; something that is surpassed; and that which does the surpassing. Heidegger had already elucidated this basic tripartite structure in his understanding of transcendence in the history of Western philosophy and

Heidegger's observation that in Eckhart God is "pure nothing" I significant for the way that in "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger posits the transcendence of Dasein as "being held out into the nothing."

<sup>(</sup>Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, pp. 127–28); (Heidegger 1982, p. 90): "das Wesen, dem man noch gleichsam jede Existenzbestimmung absprechen."

<sup>16 (</sup>Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 128; Heidegger 1982, p. 91): "das algemeinste Wesen, als die reinste noch unbestimmte Möglichkeit alles Möglichen."

Religions 2017, 8, 56 8 of 12

the determination of transcendence in relation to how the ground of Being is conceived in *The Basic Problemsof Phenomenology*:

In the popular philosophical sense of the word, the transcendent is the being that lies beyond, the otherworldly being. Frequently the term is used to designate God. In the theory of knowledge the transcendent is understood as what lies beyond the subject's sphere [Subjekt-Sphäre], things in themselves, objects [Objekte]. In this sense the transcendent is that which lies outside the subject. It is, then, that which steps beyond or has already stepped beyond the boundaries of the subject—as if it had ever been inside them—as if the Dasein steps beyond itself only when it comports itself toward a thing. (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 424; Heidegger 1982, pp. 298–99)

He argues, in both the 1927 lectures and the 1929 essay, that the human Dasein, because of its understanding of Being, is the transcendent—that which lies beyond. Dasein does not transcend itself and other beings toward an extra-worldly being or "thing," nor does it transcend itself toward beings that appear in its purview. As a result of its inherent understanding of Being, Dasein is always already beyond itself. Dasein is as transcendence: "We name world that toward which Dasein as such transcends, and shall now determine transcendence as Being-in-the-world." In terms of the ontological difference between beings and Being, Dasein surpasses being toward the world by way of its understanding of Being. Dasein's understanding of Being is the worldhood of the world. Dasein's world is not beyond or outside of beings in a sense of transcendent separation. World is the unity and totality of beings that enables Dasein's spatial awareness of itself and other beings: "Whatever the beings that have on each particular occasion been surpassed in any Dasein, they are not simply a random aggregate [zusammengefunden]; rather, beings, however they may be individually determined and structured, are surpassed in advance as a whole [Ganzheit]." (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 139; Heidegger 1998) According to Heidegger, Dasein always already transcends all beings, due to Dasein's ontological understanding of Being. In this way, it's primordial transcendence of beings enables its ontic orientation toward itself and all other beings.

Heidegger attends to this in the third major section of the 1927 The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, which is dedicated to exploring the possibility of the unity of the concept of Being, in light of the multiplicity of ways of Being that are manifested by different beings. This section is a response to the question he first asked during the early Freiburg period, that takes into account the fundamental principle of Heidegger's analysis in Being and Time: How can philosophy understand the ontological unity of beings without conflating Being with beings? He sets up his investigation as follows: "How do the beings with which we dwell show themselves to us primarily and for the most part?" (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 231; Heidegger 1982, p. 163) Heidegger explains that Dasein's primary mode of Being-with things is not to apprehend them or to reflect upon them. To consider cognition as primary is to ignore the ontological difference. Reflection is derivative and secondary: "What is primarily given instead—even if not in explicit and express consciousness—is a thing-contexture [ein Dingzusammenhang]." (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 232; Heidegger 1982, p. 163) This thing-contexture is comprised of beings taken as equipment—beings that each have a "specific functionality [Zeug-zum]" within the relational whole (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 233; Heidegger 1982, p. 164). Thus, beings are first encountered in terms of an "in-order-to", related to the work to be done or issue with which Dasein is reckoning (Heidegger 1975d, GA 2, p. 69; Heidegger 1962, p. 98). In Being and Time, Heidegger explains that the thing-contexture is comprised of beings that appear to Dasein as ready-to-hand [Zuhanden]," because they display a specific functionality within the referential totality within which the equipment is encountered" (Heidegger 1975d, GA 2, p. 70; Heidegger 1962, p. 99). Beings ready-to-hand, display an "immanent reference" for Dasein, related to a "for-which" and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 139); (Heidegger 1998, p. 109): "Wir nennen das, woraufhin das Dasein als solches transzendiert, die Welt und bestimmen jetzt die Transzendenz als In-der-Welt-sein."

Religions **2017**, *8*, 56

"in-order-to." Dasein does not cognitively apprehend the relational unity of equipment, but instead, "circumspectively" finds its bearing in regard to them. Everyday circumspection is not concerned with the essence or nature of individual beings. It is the non-cognitive, pre-reflective enactment of the "in-order-to" of beings within a referential whole, for the sake of the "towards-which" of countless everyday spatial tasks and linguistic issues. In its everyday comportment toward the world, Dasein finds itself amidst a relational totality of beings through which and for which it orients itself in the environment in which it finds itself.

As such, it is not necessary for world to be conceptually grasped in order for Dasein to surpass beings toward Being, as he outlines in the 1929 essay:

Here it is not necessary that this wholeness be expressly conceptualized, its belonging to Dasein can be veiled, the expanse of this whole is changeable. This wholeness is understood without the whole of those beings that are manifest being explicitly grasped [erfaßt] or indeed 'completely' investigated [durchforscht] in their specific connections, domains, and layers. Yet the understanding of this wholeness, an understanding that in each case reaches ahead and embraces, is a surpassing in the direction of world [Übersteig zur Welt]. (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 156; Heidegger 1998, p. 121)

Accordingly, world signifies the originary unveiling of beings, according to Dasein's apprehension of the unveiling of Being. Beings appear according to Dasein's understanding of Being. The surpassing of individual beings for the referential whole of world does not occur at certain times, when Dasein wills itself to intentionally apprehend certain beings or to pass over beings toward Being. For Dasein, the surpassing of beings toward world is the constitution of its existence: "Surpassing occurs as a whole [Ganzheit] and never merely at certain times and not at other times. It does not, for instance, occur merely or in the first place as a theoretical grasping of objects. Rather, with the fact of Dasein, such surpassing is there." (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 139; Heidegger 1998, p. 109)

According to Heidegger, Dasein passes over particular beings toward world because world is the totality of involvements that form a relational totality for the sake of Dasein's Being. Dasein confers such a significance to beings via world, according to its very Being, that is, as a being whose Being is always an issue. Thus, Heidegger signals that the transcendence of Dasein is Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 139; Heidegger 1998, p. 109), and Being-in-the-world is "a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment. Any concern is already as it is, because of some familiarity with the world." (Heidegger 1975d, GA 2, p. 77; Heidegger 1962, p. 107) The world, as the relational whole of beings, is that toward-which Dasein surpasses itself—or more precisely, that into which Dasein is always already beyond itself. This leads to the question of the nature of world and Dasein's relationship to it. How is world related to Being? How does Dasein surpass beings for Being by its inherent submission to the world in which it always already finds itself?

In attempting to answer these questions, Heidegger is determined to "philosophize", by refusing to ontically explain the ground of Dasein's lived experience. Accordingly, he is clear that world is not a "being" toward-which Dasein transcends itself: "It is not extant [Vorhanden] like things." (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 237; Heidegger 1982, p. 166) Furthermore, world is not the sum of the parts that comprise the totality of beings in the cosmos: "The world is not the sum total of extant entities. It is, quite generally, not extant at all." (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 237; Heidegger 1982, p. 166) In the same way that Heidegger read Eckhart's "Godhead" to signify that which does not exist, but which confers the pure possibility of existence to beings, Heidegger's notion of world signifies that which enables Dasein to comport itself toward beings and thus enables Dasein's possibilities for existence, even though world itself does not "exist" in the ontic sense. Thus, Dasein's transcendence is a surpassing toward world and a world from which it is inseparable. Dasein's mode of Being is a matter of transcendence toward that which is not a being, but instead, is distinctly indistinct from Dasein.

Religions 2017, 8, 56

World signifies the relational totality of Dasein's lived experience, which is enabled by its apprehension of Being. This allows beings to appear, for Dasein, as a unified whole, precisely because it holds Dasein beyond beings toward Being. Thus, Dasein "ex-ists" in the sense that its mode of Being is a surpassing toward world, taken as the relational whole of beings:

The structure of Being-in-the-world makes manifest the essential peculiarity of the Dasein, that it projects a world for itself, and it does this not subsequently and occasionally but, rather, the projecting [Vorwurf] of the world belongs to the Dasein's Being. In this projection the Dasein has always already stepped out beyond itself, ex-sistere, it is in a world. (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, pp. 241–42; Heidegger 1982, p. 299)

In this sense, Dasein does not truly surpass itself for world, a separate entity, or being that exists outside of or beyond Dasein. World is that toward-which Dasein transcends, but Dasein does not exist apart from a world. Thus, for Heidegger, Dasein is indistinct from world—indistinct from existence: "Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of the Being-in-the-world." In its indistinction from world, Dasein is the transcendent. It is simultaneously that which is beyond itself into the world that worlds for it, and the world itself.

Therefore, the formulation of worldhood signifies the ontological formulation of the transcendence of Dasein:

If the world is the transcendent, then what is truly transcendent is the Dasein. With this we first arrive at *genuine ontological sense of transcendence...* The world is transcendent because, belonging to the structure of Being-in-the-world, it constitutes stepping-over-to...as such... Because the Dasein is constituted by Being-in-the-world, it is a being which in its Being is out *beyond itself.* (Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, pp. 424–25; Heidegger 1982, p. 299)

Each being in Dasein's world has a "specific functionality" which signifies a "what-for" or "for-the-sake-of which", related to Dasein's possibilities of Being: "As the respective wholeness of that for the sake of which Dasein exists in each case, world is brought before Dasein through Dasein itself. This bringing world before itself is the originary projection of the possibilities of Dasein, insofar as, in the midst of beings, it is to be able to comport itself toward such beings." 19 World is the projection of possibilities for Dasein. World "worlds" according to Dasein's potentiality for Being, but not according to Dasein's will or cognition. The relational totality of world is projected over beings so that they only appear in relation to the potentiality for Dasein's Being. As a result, Dasein's implicit understanding of the ontological difference is projected over beings so as to both surpass them and allow them to appear for Dasein: "Yet just as it does not explicitly grasp that which has been projected, this projection of world also always casts [Überwurf] the projected world [entworfen welt] over beings. This prior casting-over [Überwurf] first makes it possible for beings as such to manifest themselves." (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 158; Heidegger 1998, p. 123) Dasein is perpetually given Being in the form of the possibilities cast over it in the form of the indistinct world. Dasein's transcendence means that world is indistinct from Dasein, but world is distinct from all beings, even though world includes all beings. In this way, world is distinctly indistinct.

Therefore, Dasein exists indistinctly from world, because it is only in and through the worlding of the world that Dasein can reckon with its inherent and incessant having-to-be. World is the possibility

<sup>18 (</sup>Heidegger 1975b, GA 24, p. 422); (Heidegger 1982, p. 297): "Selbst und Welt sind nicht zwei Seiende wie Subjekt und Objekt, auch nich wie Ich und Du, sondern Selbst und Welt sind ein der Einheit der Struktur des In der-welt-seins die Grundbestimmng des Dasein's selbst."

<sup>19 (</sup>Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 158); (Heidegger 1998, pp. 122–23): "Die Welt wird als die jeweilige Ganzheit des Umwillen eines Daseins durch dieses selbst vor es seblst gebracht. Dieses Vor-sich-selfbst-bringen von Welt ist der ursprüngliche Entwurf der Möglichkeiten des Daseins, sofern es inmitten von Seiendem zu diesem sich soll verhalten können."

Religions 2017, 8, 56 11 of 12

of Dasein's possibilities. Dasein has thus always already submitted to the worldhood of the world as the condition of its own existence: "If, however, it is a surpassing in the direction of world that first gives rise to selfhood, then world shows itself to be that for the sake of which Dasein exists." (Heidegger 1975c, GA 9, p. 156; Heidegger 1998, p. 121) If Eckhart posits Existence as God, then in terms of Dasein, Heidegger formulates Existence as world. Further, if for Eckhart, creatures are united to God as indistinct, but God is not united to creatures indistinctly, then for Heidegger, Dasein is indistinct from world. World is given to Dasein as the possibility of Dasein, and this is Dasein's transcendence.

In this reading, it is possible to read the notion of world as resonant with Eckhart's doctrine of indistinction. Heidegger read in Eckhart, a unity between God and creature that meant they are indistinguishable. For Heidegger's Eckhart, the ground of the soul was not a being, but that which enabled the possibility of all beings. Heidegger transposed this formulation into a phenomenological register by explicating Dasein as simultaneously transcendent toward the world for which it exists and Dasein as world. Dasein is indistinguishable from the world toward which it transcends itself. In a similar manner to Eckhart's God, world is always already so immanent to Dasein that Dasein is indistinguishable from it and always so transcendent from Dasein and all other beings that it cannot be located, grasped, or represented as a being. The possibility of Dasein's "da" is enabled by the projection of possibilities in its world, through its world, and as world.

### 5. Conclusions

While some attention has been paid to Heidegger's reading of Eckhart (Schürmann 1997), Heidegger's commentators have focused much of their attention on his readings of Paul, Augustine, and other religious figures. This has meant overlooking the textual cues in his early Freiburg lectures and other lecture courses concerning Eckhart's influence on his approach to worldhood and the Being of Dasein. While there is not enough evidence to draw a straight line from Eckhart's henology to Heidegger's understanding of the worldhood of the world, the foregoing analysis has sought to demonstrate that the existing evidence points to similarities in their peculiar iterations of transcendence as indistinction, which leads to a larger point about the relationship between secular philosophy and theology.

Just as young students of mathematics often first comprehend the logic of geometric scale by learning about artistic perspective—without reducing art to maths, or maths to art—the philosopher may comprehend the contours of the human's relationship to the world through an engagement with religious cosmologies. Therefore, even if Heidegger does not ascribe to Eckhart's theological vision of creation, and even if Heidegger himself might resist this reading, I would argue that Heidegger was able to more fully and vibrantly articulate his understanding of Dasein's transcendence as a result of his engagement with Eckhart's mysticism. In this way, Heidegger's reading of Eckhart demonstrates how philosophers—who maintain a methodological atheism and perhaps even a personal atheism—can philosophize *with* theology, rather than despite or against it.

In this sense, Heidegger's reading of Eckhart provides a lens through which scholars might understand the surprising, yet enduring, relationship between the atheist traditions of continental philosophy and theology that has developed in the twentieth-century. Are philosophy's "turn to religion" and the "theological turn in French phenomenology" indicative of the radical theological impulses in twentieth-century Continental thought, or of philosophy's secularization of theology? In other words, is philosophy always theology, as John Milbank claims? Or has philosophy simply smuggled theology back into its fold, as Dominique Janicaud maintains? The foregoing analysis suggests that the answer is neither. Analogy is predicated on difference. It is the recognition of difference that enables the exploration of similarity. Yet, the discovery of parallel logics does not, and should not, result in the reduction of one discourse to the other—in this case, theology to philosophy, or vice versa. Rather, as the case of Heidegger's reading of Eckhart demonstrates, turning one's eyes to the logics of a different cosmology, anthropology, or ontology, may provide the eyes to see more fully what is at play in one's own approach to the human, the world, and the relationship between

Religions 2017, 8, 56 12 of 12

them. Viewed through this lens, it's not surprising, nor problematic, that the henology of a radical medieval Dominican might help a modern phenomenologist to see how the world really works.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### References

Dobie, Robert. 2002. Meister Eckhart's 'Ontological Philosophy of Religion'. *Journal of Religion* 82: 563–85. [CrossRef]

Eckhart, Meister. 1936. *Die deutschen and lateinischen Werke. Latin Works II*. Edited by Josef Koch and Josef Quint. Stuttgart and Berlon: W. Kohlhammer.

Eckhart, Meister. 1974. Prologue to the Opus Tripartum. In *Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologues*. Translated by Armand A. Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies.

Eckhart, Meister. 1986. Commentary on Exodus. In *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*. Translated by Bernard McGinn. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Eckhart, Meister. 1986b. Sermon 4; Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher. Edited by Bernard McGinn. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Eckhart, Meister. 1991. Commentary on Genesis. In *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Sermons, and Defense*. Translated by Huston Smith, and Bernard McGinn. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Gordon, Peter Eli. 2010. Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John MacQuarrie, and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Heidegger, Martin. 1975a. Gesamtausgabe Band 60: Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, Martin. 1975b. *Gesamtausgabe Band 24: Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, Martin. 1975c. Gesamtausgabe Band 9: Wegmarken. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, Martin. 1975d. Gesamtausgabe Band 2: Sein und Zeit. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, Martin. 1982. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1998. On the Essence of Ground. In *Pathmarks*. Edited by William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 2010. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Translated by Jennifer Anna. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kisiel, Theodore. 2010. Notes for a Work on the 'Phenomenology of Religious Life' (1916–1919). In *Companion to Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Edited by S. J. McGrath and Andrzej Wiercinski. New York: Rodolpi, pp. 309–28.

Translated by Bernard McGinn. 1986, Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

McGinn, Bernard. 2005. The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany. New York: Crossroads Publishing.

Schürmann, Reiner. 1997. Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy. Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books.



© 2017 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

# God Beyond Theism? Bishop Spong, Paul Tillich and the Unicorn

Gregory W. Dawes

Prepublication version; final version published in *Pacifica* 15:1 (Feb. 2002): 65–71.



This draft paper is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License.

You are free to cite this material provided you attribute it to its author;
you may also make copies,
but you must include the author's name and a copy of this licence.

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/

## Abstract

John Shelby Spong has recently advocated belief in a 'God beyond theism'. While rejecting traditional theism, he also distinguishes his position from atheism. He suggests that there is a divine reality, which may be described as 'being itself' and which reveals itself in our commitment to unconditional ideals. The paper argues that this notion of God is vacuous, the product of a confused belief that 'being' is a characteristic of individual beings which may be universalized. Belief in such a God is also unmotivated, since there exist naturalistic explanations of the phenomena to which the Bishop appeals.

John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, is a prolific writer. His seventeen books – ranging from *Honest Prayer* (1973) to his most recent *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality* (2001) – along with his numerous articles and public appearances have won him a wide following. Interestingly, that following extends well beyond the bounds of the established churches: it includes many whose affiliation with any form of traditional religion is minimal or non-existent. His recent visit to New Zealand attracted audiences far in excess of that which one would normally expect for a theological discussion, while he also received considerable attention in the electronic and print media.

Given the controversial and populist nature of Bishop Spong's work, it is easy for those engaged in the academic study of religion to hold it in some contempt. It is true that his books are not closely argued and his claims are not well documented. On occasions he is guilty of egregious errors, as when he attributes the abandonment of the 'God hypothesis' in modern science to the work of Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727).¹ (In fact, of course, Newton was not only a devout, if unorthodox, Christian, but his physics actually required occasional divine interventions to shore up the mechanism of the universe.²) But despite these signs of sloppy scholarship, many of the Bishop's central ideas have a respectable intellectual pedigree. Therefore what he is saying deserves closer scrutiny by students of religion. In what follows I want to illustrate this claim by reference to one of the Bishop's most recent themes: the idea that our understanding of God must progress beyond the 'theism' of Christian history.

In his espousal of belief in a 'God beyond theism', Bishop Spong is clearly dependent on the work of the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich.<sup>3</sup> It was Tillich who first spoke of the need for Christianity to transcend 'theism in all its forms', so as to begin speaking about 'the God above God', who is the ultimate source of our 'courage to be'.<sup>4</sup> So if we are looking for a developed form of the views held by Bishop Spong – one which is worthy of intellectual engagement – we may find this in the work of Paul Tillich. In what follows I will use Tillich's work to interpret the Bishop's views, before posing a few questions.

I will not spend much time on the critical side of the Bishop's work, with which (as it happens) I am fundamentally in agreement. I am sympathetic to the view that 'the gods' are nothing other than what Tillich calls 'images of human nature or subhuman powers raised to a superhuman realm' To this

<sup>1</sup> John Shelby Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), p.34; 'Is God [a] Miracle Worker?' The Voice (Diocese of Newark Newspaper)

http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox30999.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen F. Mason, *A History of the Sciences* Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan,1962), pp.205-6.

<sup>3</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.64-5.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1952), p.176.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Combined Volume* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1968), vol. 1, p.235.

extent, I would accept the classic modern criticism of religion, dating from the time of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), which regards the gods as creations of human beings, projections of elements of human experience into an unseen world. I am happy to accept the 'postmodern' claim that many of the entities posited by the modern sciences must be seen in a similar light. These, too, draw upon analogies in everyday experience to create models which are used to explain the underlying reality of the world.<sup>6</sup> The difference – and it's a key one – is that the models created by the sciences are subject to a rigorous process of criticism. In other words, any such model will eventually be abandoned if it is not performing its explanatory role. I therefore regard the modern sciences as the most reliable means we have of arriving at a knowledge of reality, without (I think) falling into a kind of uncritical realism about their results. Religions, on the other hand, are notoriously resistant to criticism, being inclined to the view that their models are divinely revealed and therefore the subject of certain knowledge.

I am also inclined to agree with the Bishop that since the emergence of the modern sciences in the seventeenth century – with their impersonal models of explanation and their tradition of critical rationality – there is little point in trying to explain the way things are by reference to a divine being. Indeed insofar as religions employ personal rather than impersonal models to describe the underlying reality of the world, their claims simply fall outside what Michel Foucault would call the 'episteme' of modern knowledge. It is this realization that lies behind the Bishop's references – not entirely accurate, as we have seen – to Sir Isaac Newton, to suggest that the modern sciences have gradually made appeal to divine activity redundant. It lies behind the claim made by New Testament scholar turned atheist Michael Goulder and endorsed by the Bishop, that 'the God of the past "no longer [has] any real work to do". It also explains the Bishop's attitude to prayer, expressed in the

<sup>6</sup> Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on magic, religion and science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.321-27.

<sup>7</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'Can One Be a Christian Without Being a Theist?' *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox21096.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (1966; New York, NY: Random House, 1970), pp.xiv, xxii, et passim.

<sup>9</sup> Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*, pp.44, 54; The God Beyond Theism', *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox31099.html (19 June 2001).

tenth of his Twelve Theses (apparently modelled on Martin Luther's), where he writes that 'prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way'. For if one can no longer appeal to a divine being to explain the course of events, then any attempt to persuade that deity to alter the course of events is obviously doomed to failure. While others may wish to debate these views, their defence would be the work of another day. For the moment, I need only note that I have no serious disagreement with the Bishop's more substantive conclusions.

Where we differ is in the consequences we draw from these conclusions. If one accepts the critical arguments outlined above, the obvious consequence would seem to be atheism. One would not need to adopt a 'strong' atheism, which would deny the existence of God outright. But these arguments do seem to entail at the least a 'weak' atheism, or (if one prefers) a strong agnosticism, which denies that we have sufficient reason for affirming God's existence. For if belief in God can be accounted for in purely naturalistic terms and if appeals to the actions of God are no longer a plausible way of explaining the existence and shape of the world, it is hard to see what other grounds we could have for affirming his reality. Yet Bishop Spong claims not to be an atheist. He continues to use religious language and his words imply that this language has a distinctive referent, albeit one about which we can say very little. For instance, the Bishop speaks of 'experiencing God' in terms which suggests that this is an experience of something, or someone, who cannot be simply identified with the other objects of our experience. He says that this God is the 'ultimate reality' in his life, that he lives in 'a constant and almost mystical awareness of the divine presence'.11 He says that he is among those who 'cannot cease believing', since God is 'too real' to allow them to do so.<sup>12</sup> But what is this reality? Where is it to be found? How can we know about it?

It is at this point that the Bishop's language becomes both 'elusive and allusive'. Often his position looks like yet another retreat to religious experience, a tactic characteristic of liberal theology since the time of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). We can (it seems) no longer speak of

<sup>10</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'A Call for a New Reformation' http://www. dioceseofnewarkorg/jsspong/reform.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Fink, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p.275.

God, in any traditional sense, but we can continue to speak of our 'God-experiences'.Yet the Bishop's position is not identical with that of theological liberalism. He does speak of an experience of God, which is the basis of his faith, but it is a very particular kind of experience. God is the source of human love which (or whom) we know in the very act of loving wastefully; he is the Ground of Being which (or whom) we come to know when we ourselves have the courage to be.<sup>14</sup>

For the philosopher, of course, such expressions are infuriatingly vague. (Indeed one is tempted to say that their vagueness is their strength, since the Bishop's readers can find in them whatever meaning they want.) But they take on a more precise meaning in the work of Tillich. We may begin with Tillich's analysis of human rationality, which he understands in a very broad sense, as encompassing all of our cultural life. Tillich argues that there exists a depth dimension to human reason, which precedes the division into knowing subject and known object.15 This takes the form of a quest for an limitless and unconditioned reality, which is implicit in our all dealings with the limited and conditioned objects of experience.<sup>16</sup> In the field of cognition, this involves a striving for what Tillich calls 'truth itself', 17 a truth that is not relative and partial but absolute and complete. In the field of aesthetics, it takes the form of the striving for 'beauty itself',18 a striving which underlies every artistic work. In the field of law, this depth dimension has the form of a striving for 'justice itself', while and in the field of personal relations it takes the form of a striving for 'love itself'. 19 These are all examples of what Tillich famously calls our 'ultimate concern'.20

The existence of this ultimate concern raises the central question of religion. Is there a way in which the conflicts which arise in the exercise of reason – conflicts between the conditioned and the unconditioned – can be overcome<sup>21</sup>? Revelation answers this question in symbolic language. It does so

<sup>14</sup> Spong, 'The God Beyond Theism' and Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.68-70.

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, The Courage to Be, p.179.

<sup>17</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.104.

by way of insights received in what Tillich calls a state of 'ecstasy'. A state of ecstasy is a 'state of mind in which reason is beyond itself, that is, beyond its subject-object structure' and thus capable of grasping the reality for which it is striving. The reality it grasps is that of the ground or power of being, a which Tillich identifies with God. As the ground or power of being, God is 'being itself'. Incidentally, it is because God is 'being itself' that He cannot be thought of as a being among other beings, whose existence could be a matter of dispute. Even to talk about God as the 'highest being' is to reduce Him to the level of other beings and to deny His true nature. To speak of God as a 'person' without due qualifications is to fall into the same trap.

What can we make of these ideas? Let me begin with some positive comments. I believe that, at least in the first part of this argument, Tillich (and by association Bishop Spong) have identified something of philosophical interest. If we assume the most plausible view of human origins we have, namely the Darwinian one, there is something remarkable about our commitment to certain ideals – let's call them the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness – in a world in which they seem impossible of realization. At first sight this commitment is not readily explicable as the product of an evolutionary process which has no other 'purpose' (loosely speaking) than the successful propagation of organisms. Indeed at least two contemporary philosophers have suggested that it simply cannot be accounted for on evolutionary grounds at all.<sup>29</sup> This is not a question I wish to adjudicate. All I wish to note is that there is a question here worthy of investigation.

However, there is a theological tradition dating to the time of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) which goes further. It suggests that the existence of at least some of these ideals implies the existence of God. Loosely speaking, it is this

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.261-62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.264-65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.262.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.271.

<sup>29</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.216-37; Anthony O'Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

tradition to which Tillich and Bishop Spong seem to belong.<sup>30</sup> More precisely, for Tillich the experience of the finitude – the limited and conditioned character – of human existence raises the *question* to which the Christian revelation of God is the symbolic *answer*. As 'being itself', God is the implicit goal of our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness. He makes possible a life lived in hope in pursuit of these goals, a life which Tillich describes as the 'New Being' of faith-filled existence.<sup>31</sup>

Such claims seem to go far beyond what is warranted by the evidence. First of all, there are some philosophical objections to the way in which both Tillich and Bishop Spong describe the reality of God. As we've seen, Tillich's preferred designation of God is 'being itself', a phrase which the Bishop also uses.<sup>32</sup> This is, of course, a very traditional designation of God. No less a figure than Thomas Aquinas refers to God as ipsum esse subsistens: 'being itself existing'.33 But at least as used by Tillich, this expression seems to be the product of a twofold confusion. The first mistake is that of regarding the word 'being' as a descriptive word, capable of picking out some characteristic which all beings have in common.<sup>34</sup> The problem here, as Kant pointed out, is that 'being' is not a descriptive term.<sup>35</sup> I take nothing away from the idea of a unicorn - I deprive it of none of its characteristics - if I judge that no unicorns exist. A second error lies in imagining that 'being' can be meaningfully spoken of as a universal, as having some kind of quasiindependent existence, so that one can speak not just of the being of individual beings, but of 'being itself'.36 It is true that Bishop Spong seems to

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.91 n.1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>32</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.57.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae Ia qu.4 art.2 ad 2.

<sup>34</sup> Sidney Hook, 'The Quest for "Being" *The Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1953), p.718; A. M. Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in his Philosophical Theology* Contemporary Religious Thinkers (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp.88-99.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), A598-99; B626-27 (pp.504-5).

<sup>36</sup> H. A. Craighead, 'Paul Tillich's Arguments for God's Reality' *The Thomist* 39 (1975), pp.309–18; Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.718.

prefer what is for Tillich an equivalent term,<sup>37</sup> namely 'ground of being'.<sup>38</sup> At first sight, this suggests a very traditional conception of God: an infinite, necessary being who sustains the world of contingent, finite beings. Yet such a God is nothing less than the God of 'theism', which Spong and Tillich reject.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, on the very grounds that the Bishop has brought forward, it is not clear why we need to use this word 'God' at all. For the Bishop's mysterious 'ground of being' is apparently not responsible for the way the world is. As we have seen, the Bishop has already argued that the sciences have made such explanatory appeals to divine action redundant. If, with Tillich, the Bishop wishes to see mystical depths in our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness, then it is not at first sight clear why we need God in this context, either. We can regard such ideals as simply projections to an ideal limit of qualities which we happen to value for all sorts of ultimately practical reasons. In this case, they would be are no more pointers to a divine 'ground of being' than is the mathematician's parallel creation of the idea of infinity.<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, to recognise that all these ideals are our creations – that they are to a certain extent fictions, to which no reality completely corresponds – is not necessarily to undermine their force. A world without God, contrary to much theological (and even 'postmodern') polemics, is not necessarily a world without truth or value.41

In a word, what is most problematic about the Bishop's position is not his criticism of traditional religious language. It is the fact that he continues to use language about God, when that language seems to have been emptied of its content and stripped of its necessity. The Bishop will not only need to show his theological opponents that this 'God beyond God' has religious power. He will need to show his philosophical opponents that we *need* to continue to speak of God, in a world in which entirely naturalistic explanations are on offer for the phenomena to which he appeals. He will also need to show that the term 'God', which he continues to employ, is something more than an

<sup>37</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.261.

<sup>38</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.215-19.

<sup>39</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.46; Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.232.

<sup>40</sup> Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.719.

<sup>41</sup> For an assertion of the importance of ethical values in the context of a very strongly naturalistic explanation of their origins, see J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977; London: Penguin, 1990).

empty abstraction. For there are good reasons to believe that a God so stripped of all the characteristics of an individual being has, in fact, no reality at all.

# God Beyond Theism? Bishop Spong, Paul Tillich and the Unicorn

Gregory W. Dawes

Prepublication version; final version published in *Pacifica* 15:1 (Feb. 2002): 65–71.



This draft paper is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License.

You are free to cite this material provided you attribute it to its author;
you may also make copies,
but you must include the author's name and a copy of this licence.

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/

## Abstract

John Shelby Spong has recently advocated belief in a 'God beyond theism'. While rejecting traditional theism, he also distinguishes his position from atheism. He suggests that there is a divine reality, which may be described as 'being itself' and which reveals itself in our commitment to unconditional ideals. The paper argues that this notion of God is vacuous, the product of a confused belief that 'being' is a characteristic of individual beings which may be universalized. Belief in such a God is also unmotivated, since there exist naturalistic explanations of the phenomena to which the Bishop appeals.

John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, is a prolific writer. His seventeen books – ranging from *Honest Prayer* (1973) to his most recent *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality* (2001) – along with his numerous articles and public appearances have won him a wide following. Interestingly, that following extends well beyond the bounds of the established churches: it includes many whose affiliation with any form of traditional religion is minimal or non-existent. His recent visit to New Zealand attracted audiences far in excess of that which one would normally expect for a theological discussion, while he also received considerable attention in the electronic and print media.

Given the controversial and populist nature of Bishop Spong's work, it is easy for those engaged in the academic study of religion to hold it in some contempt. It is true that his books are not closely argued and his claims are not well documented. On occasions he is guilty of egregious errors, as when he attributes the abandonment of the 'God hypothesis' in modern science to the work of Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727).¹ (In fact, of course, Newton was not only a devout, if unorthodox, Christian, but his physics actually required occasional divine interventions to shore up the mechanism of the universe.²) But despite these signs of sloppy scholarship, many of the Bishop's central ideas have a respectable intellectual pedigree. Therefore what he is saying deserves closer scrutiny by students of religion. In what follows I want to illustrate this claim by reference to one of the Bishop's most recent themes: the idea that our understanding of God must progress beyond the 'theism' of Christian history.

In his espousal of belief in a 'God beyond theism', Bishop Spong is clearly dependent on the work of the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich.<sup>3</sup> It was Tillich who first spoke of the need for Christianity to transcend 'theism in all its forms', so as to begin speaking about 'the God above God', who is the ultimate source of our 'courage to be'.<sup>4</sup> So if we are looking for a developed form of the views held by Bishop Spong – one which is worthy of intellectual engagement – we may find this in the work of Paul Tillich. In what follows I will use Tillich's work to interpret the Bishop's views, before posing a few questions.

I will not spend much time on the critical side of the Bishop's work, with which (as it happens) I am fundamentally in agreement. I am sympathetic to the view that 'the gods' are nothing other than what Tillich calls 'images of human nature or subhuman powers raised to a superhuman realm' To this

<sup>1</sup> John Shelby Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), p.34; 'Is God [a] Miracle Worker?' The Voice (Diocese of Newark Newspaper)

http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox30999.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen F. Mason, *A History of the Sciences* Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan,1962), pp.205-6.

<sup>3</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.64-5.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1952), p.176.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Combined Volume* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1968), vol. 1, p.235.

extent, I would accept the classic modern criticism of religion, dating from the time of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), which regards the gods as creations of human beings, projections of elements of human experience into an unseen world. I am happy to accept the 'postmodern' claim that many of the entities posited by the modern sciences must be seen in a similar light. These, too, draw upon analogies in everyday experience to create models which are used to explain the underlying reality of the world.<sup>6</sup> The difference – and it's a key one – is that the models created by the sciences are subject to a rigorous process of criticism. In other words, any such model will eventually be abandoned if it is not performing its explanatory role. I therefore regard the modern sciences as the most reliable means we have of arriving at a knowledge of reality, without (I think) falling into a kind of uncritical realism about their results. Religions, on the other hand, are notoriously resistant to criticism, being inclined to the view that their models are divinely revealed and therefore the subject of certain knowledge.

I am also inclined to agree with the Bishop that since the emergence of the modern sciences in the seventeenth century – with their impersonal models of explanation and their tradition of critical rationality – there is little point in trying to explain the way things are by reference to a divine being. Indeed insofar as religions employ personal rather than impersonal models to describe the underlying reality of the world, their claims simply fall outside what Michel Foucault would call the 'episteme' of modern knowledge. It is this realization that lies behind the Bishop's references – not entirely accurate, as we have seen – to Sir Isaac Newton, to suggest that the modern sciences have gradually made appeal to divine activity redundant. It lies behind the claim made by New Testament scholar turned atheist Michael Goulder and endorsed by the Bishop, that 'the God of the past "no longer [has] any real work to do". It also explains the Bishop's attitude to prayer, expressed in the

<sup>6</sup> Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on magic, religion and science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.321-27.

<sup>7</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'Can One Be a Christian Without Being a Theist?' *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox21096.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (1966; New York, NY: Random House, 1970), pp.xiv, xxii, et passim.

<sup>9</sup> Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*, pp.44, 54; The God Beyond Theism', *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox31099.html (19 June 2001).

tenth of his Twelve Theses (apparently modelled on Martin Luther's), where he writes that 'prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way'. For if one can no longer appeal to a divine being to explain the course of events, then any attempt to persuade that deity to alter the course of events is obviously doomed to failure. While others may wish to debate these views, their defence would be the work of another day. For the moment, I need only note that I have no serious disagreement with the Bishop's more substantive conclusions.

Where we differ is in the consequences we draw from these conclusions. If one accepts the critical arguments outlined above, the obvious consequence would seem to be atheism. One would not need to adopt a 'strong' atheism, which would deny the existence of God outright. But these arguments do seem to entail at the least a 'weak' atheism, or (if one prefers) a strong agnosticism, which denies that we have sufficient reason for affirming God's existence. For if belief in God can be accounted for in purely naturalistic terms and if appeals to the actions of God are no longer a plausible way of explaining the existence and shape of the world, it is hard to see what other grounds we could have for affirming his reality. Yet Bishop Spong claims not to be an atheist. He continues to use religious language and his words imply that this language has a distinctive referent, albeit one about which we can say very little. For instance, the Bishop speaks of 'experiencing God' in terms which suggests that this is an experience of something, or someone, who cannot be simply identified with the other objects of our experience. He says that this God is the 'ultimate reality' in his life, that he lives in 'a constant and almost mystical awareness of the divine presence'.11 He says that he is among those who 'cannot cease believing', since God is 'too real' to allow them to do so.<sup>12</sup> But what is this reality? Where is it to be found? How can we know about it?

It is at this point that the Bishop's language becomes both 'elusive and allusive'. Often his position looks like yet another retreat to religious experience, a tactic characteristic of liberal theology since the time of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). We can (it seems) no longer speak of

<sup>10</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'A Call for a New Reformation' http://www. dioceseofnewarkorg/jsspong/reform.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Fink, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p.275.

God, in any traditional sense, but we can continue to speak of our 'God-experiences'.Yet the Bishop's position is not identical with that of theological liberalism. He does speak of an experience of God, which is the basis of his faith, but it is a very particular kind of experience. God is the source of human love which (or whom) we know in the very act of loving wastefully; he is the Ground of Being which (or whom) we come to know when we ourselves have the courage to be.<sup>14</sup>

For the philosopher, of course, such expressions are infuriatingly vague. (Indeed one is tempted to say that their vagueness is their strength, since the Bishop's readers can find in them whatever meaning they want.) But they take on a more precise meaning in the work of Tillich. We may begin with Tillich's analysis of human rationality, which he understands in a very broad sense, as encompassing all of our cultural life. Tillich argues that there exists a depth dimension to human reason, which precedes the division into knowing subject and known object.15 This takes the form of a quest for an limitless and unconditioned reality, which is implicit in our all dealings with the limited and conditioned objects of experience.<sup>16</sup> In the field of cognition, this involves a striving for what Tillich calls 'truth itself', 17 a truth that is not relative and partial but absolute and complete. In the field of aesthetics, it takes the form of the striving for 'beauty itself',18 a striving which underlies every artistic work. In the field of law, this depth dimension has the form of a striving for 'justice itself', while and in the field of personal relations it takes the form of a striving for 'love itself'. 19 These are all examples of what Tillich famously calls our 'ultimate concern'.20

The existence of this ultimate concern raises the central question of religion. Is there a way in which the conflicts which arise in the exercise of reason – conflicts between the conditioned and the unconditioned – can be overcome<sup>21</sup>? Revelation answers this question in symbolic language. It does so

<sup>14</sup> Spong, 'The God Beyond Theism' and Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.68-70.

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, The Courage to Be, p.179.

<sup>17</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.104.

by way of insights received in what Tillich calls a state of 'ecstasy'. A state of ecstasy is a 'state of mind in which reason is beyond itself, that is, beyond its subject-object structure' and thus capable of grasping the reality for which it is striving. The reality it grasps is that of the ground or power of being, a which Tillich identifies with God. As the ground or power of being, God is 'being itself'. Incidentally, it is because God is 'being itself' that He cannot be thought of as a being among other beings, whose existence could be a matter of dispute. Even to talk about God as the 'highest being' is to reduce Him to the level of other beings and to deny His true nature. To speak of God as a 'person' without due qualifications is to fall into the same trap.

What can we make of these ideas? Let me begin with some positive comments. I believe that, at least in the first part of this argument, Tillich (and by association Bishop Spong) have identified something of philosophical interest. If we assume the most plausible view of human origins we have, namely the Darwinian one, there is something remarkable about our commitment to certain ideals – let's call them the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness – in a world in which they seem impossible of realization. At first sight this commitment is not readily explicable as the product of an evolutionary process which has no other 'purpose' (loosely speaking) than the successful propagation of organisms. Indeed at least two contemporary philosophers have suggested that it simply cannot be accounted for on evolutionary grounds at all.<sup>29</sup> This is not a question I wish to adjudicate. All I wish to note is that there is a question here worthy of investigation.

However, there is a theological tradition dating to the time of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) which goes further. It suggests that the existence of at least some of these ideals implies the existence of God. Loosely speaking, it is this

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.261-62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.264-65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.262.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.271.

<sup>29</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.216-37; Anthony O'Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

tradition to which Tillich and Bishop Spong seem to belong.<sup>30</sup> More precisely, for Tillich the experience of the finitude – the limited and conditioned character – of human existence raises the *question* to which the Christian revelation of God is the symbolic *answer*. As 'being itself', God is the implicit goal of our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness. He makes possible a life lived in hope in pursuit of these goals, a life which Tillich describes as the 'New Being' of faith-filled existence.<sup>31</sup>

Such claims seem to go far beyond what is warranted by the evidence. First of all, there are some philosophical objections to the way in which both Tillich and Bishop Spong describe the reality of God. As we've seen, Tillich's preferred designation of God is 'being itself', a phrase which the Bishop also uses.<sup>32</sup> This is, of course, a very traditional designation of God. No less a figure than Thomas Aquinas refers to God as ipsum esse subsistens: 'being itself existing'.33 But at least as used by Tillich, this expression seems to be the product of a twofold confusion. The first mistake is that of regarding the word 'being' as a descriptive word, capable of picking out some characteristic which all beings have in common.<sup>34</sup> The problem here, as Kant pointed out, is that 'being' is not a descriptive term.<sup>35</sup> I take nothing away from the idea of a unicorn - I deprive it of none of its characteristics - if I judge that no unicorns exist. A second error lies in imagining that 'being' can be meaningfully spoken of as a universal, as having some kind of quasiindependent existence, so that one can speak not just of the being of individual beings, but of 'being itself'.36 It is true that Bishop Spong seems to

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.91 n.1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>32</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.57.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae Ia qu.4 art.2 ad 2.

<sup>34</sup> Sidney Hook, 'The Quest for "Being" *The Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1953), p.718; A. M. Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in his Philosophical Theology* Contemporary Religious Thinkers (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp.88-99.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), A598-99; B626-27 (pp.504-5).

<sup>36</sup> H. A. Craighead, 'Paul Tillich's Arguments for God's Reality' *The Thomist* 39 (1975), pp.309–18; Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.718.

prefer what is for Tillich an equivalent term,<sup>37</sup> namely 'ground of being'.<sup>38</sup> At first sight, this suggests a very traditional conception of God: an infinite, necessary being who sustains the world of contingent, finite beings. Yet such a God is nothing less than the God of 'theism', which Spong and Tillich reject.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, on the very grounds that the Bishop has brought forward, it is not clear why we need to use this word 'God' at all. For the Bishop's mysterious 'ground of being' is apparently not responsible for the way the world is. As we have seen, the Bishop has already argued that the sciences have made such explanatory appeals to divine action redundant. If, with Tillich, the Bishop wishes to see mystical depths in our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness, then it is not at first sight clear why we need God in this context, either. We can regard such ideals as simply projections to an ideal limit of qualities which we happen to value for all sorts of ultimately practical reasons. In this case, they would be are no more pointers to a divine 'ground of being' than is the mathematician's parallel creation of the idea of infinity.<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, to recognise that all these ideals are our creations – that they are to a certain extent fictions, to which no reality completely corresponds – is not necessarily to undermine their force. A world without God, contrary to much theological (and even 'postmodern') polemics, is not necessarily a world without truth or value.41

In a word, what is most problematic about the Bishop's position is not his criticism of traditional religious language. It is the fact that he continues to use language about God, when that language seems to have been emptied of its content and stripped of its necessity. The Bishop will not only need to show his theological opponents that this 'God beyond God' has religious power. He will need to show his philosophical opponents that we *need* to continue to speak of God, in a world in which entirely naturalistic explanations are on offer for the phenomena to which he appeals. He will also need to show that the term 'God', which he continues to employ, is something more than an

<sup>37</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.261.

<sup>38</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.215-19.

<sup>39</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.46; Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.232.

<sup>40</sup> Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.719.

<sup>41</sup> For an assertion of the importance of ethical values in the context of a very strongly naturalistic explanation of their origins, see J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977; London: Penguin, 1990).

empty abstraction. For there are good reasons to believe that a God so stripped of all the characteristics of an individual being has, in fact, no reality at all.



VOLUME 18, NO. 7 APRIL 2018

# Kant, Grounding, and Things in Themselves

# Joe Stratmann

University of California, San Diego

© 2018 Joe Stratmann

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 3.0 License.
<www.philosophersimprint.org/018007/>

#### I. Introduction

At the core of Kant's transcendental idealism lies the distinction between things in themselves and appearances. Interpretations of this distinction are often divided into epistemic interpretations and metaphysical interpretations. On the former, the distinction between things in themselves and appearances is construed epistemically. For instance, on Allison's (2004) influential version of this interpretation, appearances are objects considered under our forms of sensibility (viz. space and time), whereas things in themselves are those very same objects considered in abstraction from our forms of sensibility. While there is both textual and philosophical support for epistemic interpretations, my aim in this paper is to address the internecine dispute between proponents of different metaphysical interpretations of transcendental idealism. One of the main issues dividing proponents of metaphysical interpretations concerns the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances. Some hold that things in themselves and appearances correspond to two metaphysical aspects of the very same object (proponents of metaphysical one-object interpretations), whereas others hold that things in themselves and appearances correspond to distinct objects (proponents of metaphysical two-object interpretations). For instance, the traditional two-object interpretation holds that things in themselves are causes of (distinct) appearances.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, on Langton's (1998) one-object interpretation, appearances are identified with the relational properties of substances, and things in themselves are identified with the intrinsic properties of those very same substances.

Despite their differences, proponents of metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations alike claim that appearances are *grounded in* 

- 1. Thanks to Karl Ameriks, Rosalind Chaplin, Jim Kreines, Sam Newlands, Jeff Speaks, participants in the 2015 North American Kant Society PSG Meeting in Vancouver, and several anonymous referees, and very special thanks to Eric Watkins for providing comments on earlier versions of this paper. All citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* follow the standard A/B edition pagination. Citations of Kant's other works are given according to the volume and page number of the Academy edition, Kant (1902—). All translations are taken from the Cambridge Edition of Kant's works, unless noted otherwise.
- 2. Cf. Strawson (1966).

things in themselves. Call this claim *the transcendental grounding thesis*. Textual support for the transcendental grounding thesis can be found in many passages, such as the following:

If, on the other hand, appearances do not count for any more than they are in fact, namely, not for things in themselves but only for mere representations connected in accordance with empirical laws, then they themselves must have grounds [ $Gr\ddot{u}nde$ ] that are not appearances. (A537/B565)<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in several passages, Kant suggests that we can *know* that the transcendental grounding thesis is true. For instance, at A696/B724, Kant says that there are transcendental grounds of appearances "without a doubt" [ohne Zweifel]. Knowing that the transcendental grounding thesis holds is important for Kant, in part because it provides a way of knowing that there are things in themselves at all.

Nonetheless, proponents of metaphysical interpretations disagree about *how* appearances are grounded in things in themselves. Metaphysical one-object interpretations generally hold that we can know that things in themselves and appearances are related by some kind(s) of *one-object* grounding relation(s). These are grounding relations through which the grounding and grounded relata are different aspects of the same object.<sup>4</sup> Metaphysical two-object interpretations, by contrast, generally hold that we can know that things in themselves and appearances are related by some kind(s) of *two-object* grounding relation(s). These are grounding relations through which the grounding and grounded relata involve distinct objects.<sup>5</sup>

- 3. Cf. Bxxvi-Bxxvii, A251-252, A696/B724, AK 4:314-315, and AK 29:857.
- 4. Cf. Langton (1998), Marshall (2013a), and Allais (2015). Langton suggests this knowledge claim as follows: "we do have some knowledge of the things that have an intrinsic nature. We know that such things exist. Moreover, we are acquainted with some of the properties of the things that have an intrinsic nature we are acquainted with their relational properties, which make up phenomenal appearances" (22).
- 5. Cf. Van Cleve (1999), Stang (2014), and McDaniel (2015). However, McDaniel

A significant difficulty in making sense of the transcendental grounding thesis is that it is *prima facie* unclear how to characterize Kant's account of *grounding*—an account which has yet to be systematically explored in the secondary literature. My strategy in this paper is to begin by elucidating some core features of this account. This will enable us to understand some of the conditions under which different specific kinds of grounding relations obtain. This will, in turn, help to adjudicate the issue of which specific kind of grounding relation obtains between things in themselves and appearances, as well as the dispute concerning the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances.

As we will see, Kant broadly divides all grounding relations into *logical* and *real* grounding relations. Put in terms that are not alien to either Kant or contemporary metaphysics, real grounding relations are relations of *metaphysical determination*. That is, a real ground (e.g. a substance) metaphysically determines something non-identical to it (e.g. an accident of a substance). The critical Kant further divides all real grounding relations into *formal* and *material* grounding relations (at AK 11:36 — quoted below). Formal grounds encompass grounds of the possibility of appearances (e.g. space and time). By contrast, material grounds encompass grounds of the existence of something (whether it is an appearance or not). As we will see below, Kant is plausibly read on metaphysical interpretations as maintaining that things in themselves are material grounds of appearances.

But Kant countenances many specific kinds of material grounding relations. For instance, all of the categories of relation — the substance-accident relation, causation, and reciprocal causation — express specific kinds of material grounding relations. The multitude of specific kinds of material grounding relations brings us back to our original

- maintains that things in themselves are (in some sense) the hidden side of appearances, so his view does not fall neatly into the category of two-object interpretations.
- 6. Although not the main topic of their works, Kant's account of grounding is discussed by (among others) Langton (1998), Longuenesse (2005), Watkins (2005), Proops (2010), Anderson (2015), Kreines (2016), and Stang (2016a).

question: Which specific kind(s) of material grounding relation(s) does Kant have in mind in maintaining that things in themselves ground appearances? I will argue that Kant is in fact committed to denying that we can know the features needed to ascertain which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it. This follows from certain aspects of Kant's doctrine of noumenal ignorance, the thesis that we lack cognition [Erkenntnis] and specific knowledge [Wissen] of things in themselves. Kant is therefore committed to (what I will call) *noumenal-grounding ignorance*, the thesis that we are ignorant of, for each appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it, which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between them. The upshot is that noumenal-grounding ignorance rules out metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations which assert that we can know that the relationship between things in themselves and appearances involves one specific kind of material grounding relation, e.g. Langton's (1998) view.

To be sure, there are some metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations that are compatible with noumenal-grounding ignorance. Specifically, a proponent of a one-object interpretation may allow for multiple kinds of one-object grounding relations to obtain between things in themselves and appearances. Likewise, a proponent of a two-object interpretation may allow for multiple kinds of two-object grounding relations to obtain between them. Yet I will argue that the most plausible metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism compatible with noumenal-grounding ignorance is the generic grounding interpretation. On this interpretation, we can know that there are things in themselves grounding appearances, but not which specific kind(s) of one- or two-object grounding relation(s) obtain(s) between them. Our ignorance of things in themselves therefore extends to their distinctness from appearances – pace both metaphysical one-object interpretations and metaphysical two-object interpretations. In short, we can know that appearances have things in themselves as their material grounds, but not *how* the former are grounded in the latter.

In section II, I briefly trace Kant's broad distinction between logical and real grounding relations back to his early works, as well as how the critical Kant develops his view further by dividing real grounding relations into formal and material grounding relations. In section III, we will explore how Kant differentiates specific kinds of material grounding relations, and what it would take to know which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it. In section IV, I argue that Kant's doctrine of noumenal ignorance rules out knowing which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it, per noumenal-grounding ignorance. In section V, I contend that the generic grounding interpretation is the most plausible metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism that can accommodate noumenal-grounding ignorance. Several worries about noumenalgrounding ignorance and the generic grounding interpretation that it is a part of are addressed in section VI. In section VII, I conclude.

### II. Getting Grounded in Kant's Account of Grounding

Kant's discussion of grounding dates back to his early works. He draws a crucial distinction between logical and real grounds in the early 1760s, which carries over to his critical works in the 1780s (as we will see below). Consider the following passage from the Herder transcripts (from the early 1760s):

A ground is thus something by which, having been posited, something else is posited. [...] Every *ground* is either logical, through [*durch*] which the consequence [*Folge*], which is identical to it, is posited as a predicate according to the rule of identity, or *real*, through which the consequence, which is not identical to it, is not posited according to the rule of identity. (AK 28:11)

Kant first describes grounding in terms of *positing*: given that a ground is posited, what it grounds (its "consequence") is likewise posited. For something to be posited is for it to exist. He then divides all grounds into *logical* grounds and *real* grounds. Kant indicates that the relata of a logical grounding relation are (at least partially) identical to one another, since they are related by "the rule of identity".

One standard line of interpretation maintains that conceptual containment is closely tied to logical grounding. That is, something is a logical ground of something else if the concept of the former contains the concept of the latter. To borrow Kant's example from *Negative Magnitudes* (1763), the property *having a finite mind* is a logical ground of the property *being fallible* because analysis of the concept <finite mind> reveals that it contains the concept <fallibility>. Accordingly, "fallibility is identical with what is contained in the concept of a [finite — JS] mind" (AK 2:202).8

Kant says above that the relata of a real grounding relation, by contrast, are not related by the rule of identity. He thereby indicates that real grounding is irreflexive — a point he makes explicit a bit later, at AK 28:13.9 Later in the Herder transcripts, Kant further clarifies the nature of real grounding as follows:

Every determination of things, however, which demands [heischt] a real ground, is posited through something else, and the connection [nexus] of a real ground with the real consequence is thus not comprehended [eingesehen] from the rule of identity, also cannot be expressed through a judgment, but is rather a simple concept. (AK 28:24)

- 7. Kant explicitly says as much in the roughly contemporaneous *Beweisgrund* (1763): "The concept of position [*Position*] or positing [*Setzung*] is completely simple and identical with the concept of being in general [*mit dem vom Sein überhaupt einerlei*]" (AK 2:73). Cf. Stang (2016a, 79).
- 8. Cf. Watkins (2005, 162–165) and Stang (2016a, 85). The translations of the Herder transcripts here are largely based on those of Watkins (2005), with a few changes.
- 9. Cf. AK 1:394. For the critical Kant's affirmation of the irreflexivity of real grounding, see AK 8:198, AK 28:549, and AK 29:810.

As in the previous passage, Kant describes a real consequence as something that is posited through positing a real ground and as non-identical with the latter. It therefore seems that the relationship of positing between a real ground and its consequence is one of (what we might call) *metaphysical determination*. That is, a real ground *generates* or *gives rise to* what it grounds.<sup>10</sup>

Kant clarifies later in the Herder transcripts that there are several specific kinds of real grounding relations. For instance, a substance is a real ground of any accidents inhering in it: "The *substantial* contains the first real ground of all inhering accidents" (AK 28:25). He likewise claims that a cause is a real ground of its effect. In both cases, what is grounded is posited as a result of positing its real ground(s). We will explore how these specific kinds of real grounding relations are characterized in Kant's critical works further below. In the case of the case of the contact of the contact of the case of the

Kant's broad distinction between logical and real grounding carries over to his critical works. He also still frames grounding partly in terms of positing in his critical discussion of grounding. For instance, in Metaphysik Mrongovius, a transcript of some of his critical metaphysics lectures, he says that "ground consists just in this, that which, having been posited, another is posited determinately" (AK 29:819).<sup>13</sup>

- 10. Kant says above that the determinations of things demand real grounds. Roughly, *determinations* [*Bestimmungen*] are properties of things. Cf. AK 2:72 and AK 2:87–88. For further discussion, see Watkins (2005) and Stang (2016a).
- Cf. AK 28:39 and AK 28:55. See Watkins (2005) for extensive discussion of Kant's early account of causation.
- 12. The notion of grounding has been the subject of renewed interest in contemporary metaphysics. Cf. Fine (2001), Schaffer (2009), and Rosen (2010). Like many contemporary construals of grounding, Kant's notion of real grounding concerns what metaphysically generates what and is irreflexive. Nonetheless, Kant's notion of real grounding differs from contemporary construals of grounding in several ways. Perhaps most notably, Kant claims that causation is a kind of real grounding relation in both his early and critical works, whereas many contemporary proponents of grounding deny this—though see Bennett (2017). Systematically comparing Kant's account of grounding to contemporary accounts of grounding must await another occasion.
- 13. Cf. AK 28:548-549, AK 29:808, and AK 11:35.

However, the critical Kant further divides all real grounds into *formal* and *material* grounds. As he explains in a letter to Carl Leonhard Reinhold in 1789:

As an aside, I note (in order to be able to better attend to Eberhard's treatment later) that the real ground is in turn twofold, either formal (the intuition of the object), as in, e.g., the sides of the triangle containing the ground of the angles, or the material (of the existence of things), which makes that which contains the ground to be called *cause* [*Ursache*]. (AK 11:36, my translation)

Kant claims here that *formal* grounding concerns "the intuition of the object". He claims that *material* grounding, by contrast, concerns "the existence of things". By this, I take him to mean that material grounds typically determine the existence of something, where *something* could be a thing, a property, a state of affairs, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike material grounds, it therefore seems that formal grounds can never ground the existence of something by themselves. For

14. Kant means several different things in saying that what is grounded is posited determinately by its ground above at AK 29:819. For one, determinately means that a ground has some particular consequence. By contrast, positing a consequence involves positing a ground indeterminately (AK 29:808). That is, a particular consequence is not necessarily linked to one ground in particular; there may be many potential (but individually sufficient) grounds of it. Another thing that Kant means by determinately is that what is grounded follows from its ground according to a general rule. As he puts it: "Determinately means according to a general rule. Every ground gives a rule; therefore the connection of the ground and the consequence is necessary" (AK 29:808). Kant suggests here that the fact that a consequence is posited as a result of positing some ground(s) according to a general rule entails that the latter necessitates the former. Cf. AK 28:548-549 and AK 29:816 - though see Hogan (2013) for complications pertaining to free actions. Nonetheless, the connection of a ground with what it grounds is finer-grained than mere necessitation. This is highlighted by Kant's above example at AK 11:36 that the sides of a triangle are the ground of its angles. The properties being trilateral and being triangular necessitate one another, even though the former is an asymmetric ground of the latter. Cf. Stang (2016a, 208–209). Since nothing below hinges on these particular features of grounding, I will leave them for further discussion elsewhere.

instance, Kant describes space and time (our forms of intuition) as formal grounds of appearances.<sup>15</sup> And he denies that space by itself can ever determine the existence of things: "Thus space absolutely (by itself alone [für sich allein]) cannot occur as a determiner of the existence of things [nicht als etwas Bestimmendes in dem Dasein der Dinge vorkommen], because it is not an object at all, but only the form of possible objects" (A431/B459, translation modified). Nonetheless, space and time are still real grounds of the possibility of appearances. That is, to be possible, appearances have to meet the constraints imposed on them by space and time.<sup>16</sup> Space and time are therefore partial grounds of appearances — albeit plausibly only insofar as they ground the possibility of appearances.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, Kant maintains that things in themselves ground the (actual) existence of appearances. As he suggests in his response to Eberhard in 1790: "It [the *Kritik*—JS] posits this ground of the material [*Grund des Stoffes*] of sensory representations not once again in things, as objects of the senses, but in something super-sensible, which grounds the latter, and of which we can have no cognition" (AK 8:215). Kant is plausibly read here as implying that things in themselves ground the existence of appearances. For he describes things in themselves here as grounds of the material of sensory representations, rather than as grounds of the *possibility* of the material of sensory representations. He likewise describes things in themselves as grounds of appearances in his other statements of the transcendental grounding thesis (e.g. those cited in footnote 3), rather than as grounds of the

- 15. Cf. A93/B125 and AK 8:222.
- 16. Among many other passages, see A34/B51, B67, A93/B125, A99, B265, and B293. For further discussion of how space and time ground the possibility of appearances, see Stang (2016a) and Messina (2017).
- 17. Kant's notion of a partial ground is expressed by (what he calls) an *insufficient* ground. In Metaphysik Mrongovius, Kant says, "An insufficient ground is [...] a part of the sufficient" (AK 29:817). That is, an insufficient ground is a member of some collection of grounds which are *jointly sufficient* to ground something else, even though an insufficient ground is never by itself sufficient to do so. Cf. AK 29:819.

possibility of appearances (unlike how he describes space and time). Things in themselves are therefore plausibly material grounds of appearances.<sup>18</sup>

Now proponents of metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations generally agree (albeit often implicitly) that Kant holds that things in themselves are material grounds of appearances. But they disagree about which specific kind(s) of material grounding relation(s) obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances. Specifically, they disagree about whether this relationship involves some kind(s) of one-object relation(s) or some kind(s) of two-object relation(s). To adjudicate this dispute, let's begin by sketching some specific kinds of material grounding relations that Kant countenances.<sup>19</sup>

- 18. Here are two points of clarification: First, things in themselves *qua* material grounds are merely partial real grounds of appearances. For things in themselves *qua* material grounds do not ground appearances and their properties by themselves; minimally, appearances and their properties also presuppose the formal grounds of space and time. Second, although all kinds of grounds that *determine the existence of something* seem to be material grounds, the converse is not true. For Kant discusses the idea of a material ground of the possibility of things in general he describes God in this way (A576/B604). See Stang (2016a) for extensive discussion.
- 19. One might wonder whether a proponent of a metaphysical one-object interpretation could maintain that appearances and the things in themselves grounding them are not merely two metaphysical aspects of the same object (per my above characterization of this interpretation), but rather are numerically identical to one another. This view would be incompatible with holding that things in themselves are real grounds of appearances, since real grounding is irreflexive. Nonetheless, I concede that proponents of one-object interpretations could interpret Kant's claim that things in themselves ground appearances as the claim that things in themselves are logical (rather than real) grounds of appearances, in regarding the latter as being (at least partially) identical to the former. While it is worth exploring elsewhere, I will bracket this sort of interpretation for purposes of this paper. For it is not clear that this sort of interpretation constitutes a distinctly *metaphysical* one-object interpretation. Proponents of epistemic interpretations of transcendental idealism might also interpret Kant's claim that things in themselves ground appearances in this way. Moreover, as a sociological point, most proponents of metaphysical one-object interpretations do opt (at least implicitly) for a real grounding reading of the transcendental grounding thesis. What I say below therefore addresses the great bulk of metaphysical interpretations that have been advanced in the secondary literature.

All of the categories of relation (viz. the substance-accident relation, causation, and reciprocal causation) express specific kinds of material grounding relations, since they all involve the determination of the existence of something. <sup>20</sup> The substance-accident relation is an asymmetric material grounding relation through which an accident of a substance is grounded in that substance via an inherence relation. It is a *one-object* material grounding relation, in that an accident is not an entirely distinct thing from the substance in which it inheres. For accidents are properties that are merely particular ways for a substance to exist: "The determinations of a substance that are nothing other than particular ways for it to exist are called accidents" (A186/B229).

Now one might already worry whether there really are many specific kinds of material grounding relations, including the substance-accident relation. For the acute reader will have noticed that Kant seems to identify the notion of a material ground with the notion of a cause [*Ursache*] above at AK 11:36. However, I think Kant is using 'cause' in a broader sense at AK 11:36 to include *grounds that determine the existence of something*, rather than in the narrower sense of the grounding relation of causation. For Kant does appeal to other specific kinds of material grounding relations (beyond causation) through which something determines the existence of something else. The substance-accident relation is just one example.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Kant holds that there are

- 20. Kant uses some variant of the phrase 'determination of existence' to describe what occurs through the categories of relation in a number of places. Cf. B201n, A177/B219, A182/B225, A186–187/B229–230, A194/B239, A212/B259, A215/B262, AK 29:770–771, and AK 29:822–823. Note that this phrase often has a more technical meaning in the Analogies of Experience, viz. involving the determination of a property or state of a substance. Cf. Watkins (2005). But I will continue to use this phrase in its more generic meaning, which also encompasses (for instance) the determination of the existence of a thing itself (rather than merely one of its properties).
- 21. For instance, Kant maintains that the real essence of a thing has two metaphysical parts: its attributes and its essential properties. The attributes of a thing are grounded in the essential properties of a thing. Cf. AK 8:829, AK 28:553, and Stang (2016a). Moreover, Kant claims that, by standing in reciprocal causal relations to one another, objects can ground the existence of a whole composed of them. *The world* (considered dynamically) is an

causal relations beyond causation proper. For instance, Kant suggests that a substance is causally responsible for the accidents that inhere in it.<sup>22</sup> These points help to explain why Kant uses the term 'cause' to describe material grounds at AK 11:36, even though (on my reading) the notion of a material ground extends beyond the notion of a cause in the narrower sense.<sup>23</sup>

None of this is to deny that (efficient) causation is a specific kind of material grounding relation, through which a cause determines the existence of an effect. On Watkins' (2005) meticulous analysis, substances act as causes. In empirical instances of causation, a substance does not determine the existence of another substance itself, but only the state of another substance. As Kant puts this point in the Second Analogy: "This arising concerns [...] not the substance (for that does not arise), but its state. It is therefore merely alteration, and not an origination out of nothing" (A206/B251). In the same passage, however, Kant leaves open that non-empirical substances (e.g. God) can causally create other substances. In any case, unlike the substance-accident relation, causation is a two-object relation, in that an instance of causation involves (at least) two distinct substances. Kant nicely articulates this point in saying that the concept of a cause "signifies a particular kind of synthesis, in which given something A something entirely different [ganz verschiedenes] B is posited according to a rule" (A90/B122).<sup>24</sup>

A third specific kind of material grounding relation is the relation between the intrinsic properties of a substance and its relational

interconnected whole of causally interacting objects. Cf. B112–113, A214–215/B261–262, A218n/B265n, AK 4:499, AK 4:503, and AK 28:565–566.

- 22. Cf. AK 29:770-771 and Watkins (2005, 257-265).
- 23. As a historiographical note, distinguishing between *ground* or *cause* in a broad sense (encompassing many kinds of grounds) and *ground* or *cause* in a narrow sense (encompassing efficient causes) was not uncommon in the German philosophical tradition preceding Kant. For instance, Crusius draws this distinction in §34 of his *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten* (1745).
- 24. See Hennig (2011) for an alternative event-based interpretation of the relata of causation. I will assume Watkins' account of the relata of causation for the purposes of this paper though nothing about my position below hinges on his account being correct.

properties. This relation plays a central role on Langton's (1998) metaphysical one-object interpretation. Langton holds that appearances are the relational properties of substances. They are grounded in things in themselves, which she identifies with the intrinsic properties of those very same substances. Since the relational properties of a substance are grounded in the intrinsic properties of that very same substance, this relation counts as a one-object grounding relation.<sup>25</sup> One distinctive feature of Langton's view is that this relation is supposed to be non-causal; intrinsic properties do not ground relational properties causally. For although relational properties are causally efficacious on Langton's view, the intrinsic properties constituting things in themselves are causally inert. Below, I will assume Langton's interpretation of this relation in Kant's works, even though I will ultimately reject her application of it to characterizing the relationship between things in themselves and appearances.

### **III. Differentiating Material Grounding Relations**

The above discussion by no means covers all the specific kinds of material grounding relations that Kant employs. Nor is the use of grounding claims more generally restricted to Kant's theoretical philosophy. For instance, Kant famously claims in the second *Critique* (AK 5:4n) that freedom is the ground of being [ratio essendi] of the moral law.<sup>26</sup> But now that we have explored a few specific kinds of material grounding relations that he employs, we can identify some of the ways in which specific kinds of material grounding relations are differentiated from the general notion of material grounding. This will, in turn, allow us to

- 25. Cf. A284/B340. In more recent work, Langton (2006) clarifies that she really means to identify appearances with (what we would call) extrinsic properties, rather than relational properties despite mostly speaking in terms of the latter in her (1998) book. Nothing hinges on this point in this paper.
- 26. Elsewhere in the same passage (AK 5:4n), Kant claims that the moral law provides a ground for cognizing [ratio cognoscendi] the moral law. This illustrates that the distinction between logical and real grounds (and the kinds of grounds falling under them) is not exhaustive of all the kinds of grounds that Kant countenances. For instance, Kant also makes use of grounds of cognition (as in this passage) and grounds of assent. Cf. Chignell (2007).

identify some necessary conditions for knowing which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it.

As we saw above, the general notion of material grounding that Kant describes at AK 11:36 (quoted above) encompasses several specific kinds of relations through which something determines the existence of something else. This notion also reflects the various features of the even more general notion of real grounding, e.g. irreflexivity. However, this notion is undetermined with respect to certain features, i.e. it leaves open whether the kinds of relations satisfying it have those features or not. For instance, it is undetermined with respect to being a one-object relation and being a two-object relation. For some specific kinds of material grounding relations are one-object relations, whereas others are two-object relations. The specific kinds of material grounding relations explored above are differentiated (in part) on this basis. As we saw above, Kant thinks that accidents are not entirely distinct from the substances in which they inhere. By contrast, a cause is entirely distinct from its effect, in that they correspond to two entirely distinct substances.27

In light of the above discussion, the following sorts of features are also necessary (although by no means sufficient) for (fully) differentiating specific kinds of material grounding relations from the general notion of material grounding:

(C1) Numerical Differentiation: the possible numerical relation of the relata (one-one, one/many-one, etc.);

(C2) Kind Differentiation: the possible kind of relata, i.e. the ontological category to which the relata belong (*substance*, *accident*, *relational property*, etc.)

(C1) concerns the *possible* range of numerical relations between a grounded entity and its (immediate, non-transitive) ground(s). For causation to obtain between a grounded entity and the entities immediately grounding it, it must be true that this grounded entity bears a relation to its ground(s) through which something *can* have one or several grounds by that kind of relation, since causation is a relation through which an effect can have one or more causes. By contrast, the causal composition relation (described in footnote 21) does not admit of this flexibility. That is, if an object is grounded via this kind of relation, it must have multiple grounds via this kind of relation. For the grounding relata of this relation involve several objects standing in reciprocal causal relations to one another. The general notion of material grounding is undetermined with respect to (C1); it encompasses relations that can be one/many-one, relations that can only be many-one, etc.

That (C2) is necessary for differentiating specific kinds of material grounding relations from the general notion of material grounding should be clear. For instance, the relationship between intrinsic properties and relational properties described in the previous section *can only* have intrinsic properties and relational properties as its relata. *Mutatis mutandis* for the substance-accident relation and causation. The general notion of material grounding is undetermined with respect to the kind of relata that it can take, e.g. substances, accidents, relational properties, etc.<sup>28</sup>

28. Given that all the specific kinds of material grounding relations explored above involve (in some way) some substance(s) as their grounding relatum, one might wonder whether there are any specific kinds of material grounding that do not involve a substance as their grounding relatum. We will see

<sup>27.</sup> Whether the general notion of material grounding is strongly unified for Kant (e.g. in the sense of being a genus under which specific kinds of material grounding fall as species) is a difficult issue, but one that we can remain neutral on here. Moreover, it is an interesting question as to how to understand the unschematized category of a cause (and the corresponding unschematized relation of causation) in this context. Kant says of this unschematized category that "it is something that allows an inference to the existence of something else" (A243/B301). On the one hand, Kant might mean to identify the unschematized relation of causation with some general notion of grounding. Cf. Allais (2015, 69). On the other hand, he might still hold that it involves causation in the narrower sense, thereby implicating two entirely distinct substances, etc. We can remain neutral on this issue here.

How specific kinds of material grounding relations are differentiated from the general notion of material grounding has immediate ramifications for the conditions under which we could know which specific kind of material grounding relation immediately obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it. To know that a specific kind of material grounding relation R obtains with respect to an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it, it is necessary that we know the features pertaining to (C1) and (C2) differentiating R from the general notion of material grounding. With respect to (C1), we would need to know the possible range of numerical relations that obtain between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it in order to know which specific kind of relation obtains between them. This constraint still applies to numerically flexible relations (e.g. causation). For in that case, we would need to know that the relation that obtains has this much flexibility, i.e. that an appearance in question stands in a kind of relation to things in themselves through which it can have one or more grounds by that kind of relation. With respect to (C2), we would likewise need to know the possible kind of relata involved in the relation in order to know which specific kind of relation obtains. For instance, knowing that the relationship between relational properties and intrinsic properties described by Langton (1998) obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself immediately grounding it requires knowing that the former is some *relational property* of a substance and that the latter is some intrinsic property of a substance.

Note that our focus here is on the relationship between appearances and the things in themselves *immediately* grounding them, rather than on any things in themselves that may transitively ground appearances — this should be assumed below whenever it is not made

explicit. For it is the nature of the immediate grounding relationship (viz. whether it involves a one- or two-object relation) that settles whether the relationship between things in themselves and appearances involves two aspects of the same object (per one-object interpretations) or two entirely distinct objects (per two-object interpretations). Even a proponent of a one-object interpretation could concede the existence of transitive grounds of appearances that are entirely distinct from appearances. For instance, a proponent of a one-object interpretation could concede that God is both a ground of appearances and entirely distinct from appearances. She could do so by maintaining that God grounds appearances transitively, e.g. by creating things in themselves that in turn immediately ground appearances by a kind of one-object relation.

### IV. Numerical Ignorance and Kind Ignorance

Now that we have laid out some of the necessary conditions for knowing which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it, the crucial question now becomes whether or not Kant thinks that we can satisfy these conditions. To ascertain whether we can satisfy these necessary conditions, we need to consider more closely Kant's views concerning our knowledge of things in themselves.

Kant famously takes a dim view of our epistemic access to things in themselves. He is committed to *noumenal ignorance*, the thesis that we have neither cognition nor specific knowledge of things in themselves.<sup>29</sup> Note that this thesis is framed in terms of two different notions: *cognition* [*Erkenntnis*] and *knowledge* [*Wissen*]. Although I cannot explore all of the differences between these two notions here, one crucial difference between them is that cognition involves a *givenness constraint*, for Kant. That is, an object must be given to us in some way for cognition to be had of it. For human agents, the way in which objects

in the next section that Kant thinks that accidents (at the level of things in themselves) could be (for all we know) the immediate material grounds of thoughts. Kant could not hold this unless he thought that accidents could serve as material grounds. Cf. AK 4:333 and Proops (2010, 461–464).

<sup>29.</sup> Cf. Langton (1998), Van Cleve (1999), Ameriks (2003), Chignell (2014), Allais (2015), and McDaniel (2015).

are given to us is via our forms of intuition, viz. space and time.<sup>30</sup> One common line of interpretation maintains that the givenness constraint helps to explain why Kant thinks we lack cognition of things in themselves. Things in themselves are not given to us because they are non-spatio-temporal, by Kant's lights. Hence, we lack cognition of things in themselves because the givenness constraint on cognition is not satisfied.<sup>31</sup>

Kant's notion of knowledge, in comparison with his notion of cognition, is more like our contemporary notion of propositional knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Crucially, knowledge plausibly does not involve a givenness constraint, for Kant. For, as noted in the introduction, he holds that we can have some general knowledge about things in themselves, even though they are not given to us, e.g. that *things in themselves are non-spatio-temporal* and that *appearances are grounded in things in themselves*. I will focus on knowledge (rather than cognition) here, because knowledge is less demanding than cognition in that it does not involve a givenness constraint and in that Kant thinks we can still achieve knowledge with respect to certain substantive propositions about things in themselves (e.g. regarding their existence).

However, there are strong reasons for thinking that our ignorance of things in themselves rules out being able to know which features pertaining to (C1) and (C2) obtain with respect to the relationship between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it. This, in turn, rules out knowing which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between them.<sup>33</sup> It

will help to put labels on these ignorance theses. Corresponding to (C1), numerical ignorance says that we lack knowledge of whether, for each appearance, it immediately stands to things in themselves by a kind of one-one relation, or by a kind of one/many-one relation, etc. Corresponding to (C2), kind ignorance says that we lack knowledge of which kinds of things in themselves immediately ground appearances, i.e. which particular ontological category such things in themselves belong to (e.g. substance, accident, etc.).

While there is admittedly no short argument for attributing either numerical ignorance or kind ignorance to Kant, the textual evidence strongly suggests that he endorses them. Starting with numerical ignorance, Kant explicitly claims that we cannot know whether, for each appearance, there is a composite thing in itself grounding it or a simple thing in itself grounding it. As he puts it in his response to Eberhard: "nobody can have the least knowledge [kann niemand im mindesten wissen] of whether the super-sensible which underlies that appearance as substrate is, as thing in itself, either composite or simple [...]" (AK 8:209n). Now, by itself, this claim does not entail numerical ignorance, or even entail that we lack knowledge of the total number of things in themselves grounding each appearance. For a composite thing in itself is a single thing in itself, just as ordinary composite things (e.g. tables and chairs) are single things.

But, given some auxiliary assumptions that Kant is plausibly committed to, ignorance of the total number of things in themselves grounding each appearance (immediately or transitively) does follow. First, it is at the very least possible (for all we know) that a composite thing in itself is grounded in its proper parts.<sup>35</sup> Second, it seems, at the very least, possible (for all we know) that material grounding is transitive across different specific kinds of material grounding relations

<sup>30.</sup> Among many other passages, see A50/B74, A92/B125, A286/B342, and AK 20:273.

<sup>31.</sup> For a recent discussion of this line of thought, see Watkins and Willaschek (2017a).

<sup>32.</sup> Cf. Chignell (2007) and Watkins and Willaschek (2017b).

<sup>33.</sup> Although I will not explicitly argue for this below, the considerations below would also act as considerations against thinking that we can have *cognition* of which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it.

<sup>34.</sup> Kant is plausibly read as making a similar (albeit narrower) point in the second paralogism with respect to thoughts: we cannot know that thoughts are immediately grounded in a simple (rather than a composite) thing in itself. Cf. A351–361 and A683/B711.

<sup>35.</sup> Cf. AK 8:208 and AK 28:565-566.

for both things in themselves and appearances, i.e. if  $xR_1y$  and  $yR_2z$  (where  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  are instances of different specific kinds of material grounding relations), then x grounds z. Given these two auxiliary assumptions, the following is an epistemic possibility: Supposing that a composite thing in itself grounds an appearance (which, per AK 8:209n, is an epistemic possibility), all of the proper parts of the composite thing in itself could (for all we know) ground that appearance transitively by grounding the composite thing in itself — regardless of whether the specific kinds of grounding relations are different across these relations. It follows that we lack knowledge of whether, for each appearance, there are multiple things in themselves grounding it (e.g. a composite thing in itself grounding it (e.g. a simple thing in itself).

Two conclusions can be immediately drawn from this. First, we are ignorant of the total number of things in themselves grounding each appearance.<sup>37</sup> Second, we are ignorant, to some extent, of the possible numerical relations that the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding an appearance stands in to any of its further grounds at the level of things in themselves. For if the thing in itself immediately grounding an appearance is composite, it may in turn be grounded by a many-one composition relation, viz. which it bears to its proper parts. By contrast, if the thing in itself immediately grounding an appearance is simple, it cannot stand in a many-one composition relation to any grounds that it may have (this is trivial, given its simplicity). Admittedly, these conclusions still do not logically entail *numerical ignorance* (as it is characterized above). But they strongly support attributing numerical ignorance to Kant. For it is difficult to see how or why Kant would maintain these two conclusions, while

denying numerical ignorance. I will say a bit more in defense of numerical ignorance below.

There are also many passages that support attributing *kind igno-rance* to Kant. Consider the following passage from Metaphysik K: "We know nothing of the substrate of the matter (of the noumenon), whether it is of the same kind as the thinking principle in us" (AK 28:761). Kant suggests here that even if we could know what kind of entity "the thinking principle in us" is (i.e. what kind of entity grounds our thoughts at the level of things in themselves), it does not follow that we can know anything about what kind(s) of entities underlie other appearances. Admittedly, it is somewhat unclear what Kant means here by 'the same kind'. He could mean that we cannot know whether the things in themselves grounding appearances (other than thoughts) are non-mental entities or mental entities. Or he could mean "kind" in the way that I am using the term, i.e. as concerning the ontological category (*substance*, *accident*, etc.) to which these things in themselves belong.

In support of the latter reading (although not to the exclusion of the former), Kant is plausibly read in the Paralogisms as also denying that we can know the kind of things in themselves which (immediately) grounds thoughts, where kind is understood as which ontological category these things in themselves belong to. As he suggests there: "But it is obvious that the subject of inherence is designated only transcendentally through the I that is appended to thoughts, without noting the least property of it, or cognizing or knowing [wissen] anything at all [überhaupt] about it" (A355). Kant indicates that we lack both cognition and knowledge of the kind of entity underlying thoughts, in saying here that we cannot cognize or know "anything at all about" this entity. This suggests that other (admittedly more ambiguous) passages from the Paralogisms should also be read as ruling out both cognition and knowledge of the kind of entity underlying thoughts. For instance, Kant claims in the B edition of the Paralogisms that, through self-consciousness, one cannot "determine the way I exist [as a thing in itself – JS], whether as substance or as accident" (B420). Similar

<sup>36.</sup> There is some textual evidence that Kant holds the stronger position that real grounding is in fact generally transitive. Cf. AK 28:552 and AK 29:817.

<sup>37.</sup> Many commentators (e.g. Marshall 2013a, Stang 2014, Allais 2015, and McDaniel 2015) accept this conclusion, even if they do not provide as explicit an argument for it as I have provided here.

remarks can be found throughout the Paralogisms and elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> It is plausible to conclude from such passages that Kant thinks that we lack knowledge (and not merely cognition) of which ontological category the things in themselves grounding thoughts belong to.<sup>39</sup>

Kant's position in the Paralogisms supports the idea that he endorses kind ignorance about things in themselves more generally. For it seems that if kind ignorance holds in the specific case of the things in themselves immediately grounding thoughts, it also holds more generally with respect to the things in themselves immediately grounding appearances. Any considerations that weigh in favor of (and lead Kant to accept) kind ignorance of the former will plausibly also weigh in favor of kind ignorance of the latter.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the above textual basis for ascribing numerical and kind ignorance to Kant, there is a plausible philosophical story explaining Kant's endorsement of these claims. With respect to numerical ignorance, it seems that a kind of one-one relation (for instance) is just as apt to characterize the relationship between things in themselves and appearances as a kind of one/many-one relation or a kind of one-one/many relation. Nothing seems special (for all we know) about any of these sorts of possible numerical relations that would either suggest that appearances *cannot be* immediately related to things in themselves by a certain range of numerical relations or suggest that appearances *must be* immediately related to things in themselves by that range of numerical relations. Accordingly, it seems that we have no reason to rule out (as epistemic possibilities) any of these options

- 38. Cf. A350, A358, A360, A365–366, A398, B430, A683/B711, AK 4:314–315, and AK 5:466.
- See Marshall (2010) and Proops (2010) for further defense of this reading of the Paralogisms.
- 40. Nonetheless, there are a few complications worth signposting here. First, one might interpret Kant above at A355 as asserting that there is some sort of inherence relation obtaining between thoughts and the subject at the level of things in themselves, even if we cannot know whether the subject involves a substance, an accident, etc. Second, Kant does make suggestions about the kinds of things in themselves there are in certain passages. I will address these complications in section VI.

for characterizing the relationship between things in themselves and appearances. Parallel reasoning supports kind ignorance. It seems that accidents or relational properties (for instance) are just as apt to serve as the immediate material grounds of appearances as substances or intrinsic properties are. Nothing seems special (for all we know) about any of these ontological categories that would either suggest that the things in themselves immediately grounding appearances *cannot* belong to those ontological categories or suggest that such things in themselves *have to* belong to those ontological categories.<sup>41</sup>

But one might object to kind ignorance in the following way: Many proponents of metaphysical interpretations conclude that things in themselves must belong to a particular ontological category based on our knowledge of the ontological status of appearances. For instance, Langton (1998) suggests that since appearances are merely collections of relational properties, they require intrinsic properties grounding them. But one upshot of the above discussion is that it is not clear why even if appearances are collections of relational properties, this requires that they be immediately grounded in intrinsic properties. It seems to be just as much of a live option that appearances (so construed) are immediately grounded in further relational properties (or some other kind of entity) at the level of things in themselves. This is precisely what is suggested by Kant's above articulations of kind ignorance. These passages indicate that Kant holds that knowledge of which ontological categories the things in themselves immediately grounding appearances belong to is underdetermined by our knowledge of which ontological categories appearances belong to.<sup>42</sup>

- 41. In certain passages, Kant more or less speaks in this way. For instance, regarding the properties associated with the soul (e.g. having thoughts), he says, "That simplicity of substance, etc., ought to be only the schema for this regulative principle, and it is not presupposed as if it were the actual ground [wirkliche Grund] of properties of the soul. For these properties could rest on entirely different grounds, with which we are not acquainted at all [...]" (A683/B711, translation modified).
- 42. Of course, Langton's position also rests on textual evidence for thinking that things in themselves are intrinsic properties. I will discuss these passages further in section VI.

Nonetheless, one might appeal to analytic truths to defend the claim that the things in themselves immediately grounding appearances must belong to some particular ontological category. For instance, recall that Kant claims at A186/B229 that accidents are ways for a substance to exist. On a natural reading of this passage, Kant is presenting this as analytically true of what an accident is. So supposing that we could know that appearances are accidents, it seems that there is an analytic path to concluding that every appearance must be grounded in some substance or other at the level of things in themselves via the substance-accident relation.

In response, even if it is analytically true that an accident must be grounded in some substance, it is not analytically true that positive properties more generally (which Kant sometimes calls "realities") have to be grounded in a substance. That is, the concept of a positive property (unlike the concept of an accident) does not entail that anything falling under this concept must be grounded in a substance. Now the crucial question is this: how exactly could we know that appearances are accidents, rather than positive properties (or collections thereof) more generally? For we would need to know that appearances are accidents (rather than merely positive properties) to draw the conclusion (via the above analytic truth) that appearances are grounded in substances at the level of things in themselves. It is difficult to see on what basis we could know (either a priori or a posteriori) that appearances are accidents, even assuming that we can know that appearances are not genuine substances.<sup>43</sup> We certainly cannot infer merely from the supposition that appearances are positive properties that they are accidents. Hence, in the absence of some further story, this attempt (and others) to undermine kind ignorance by appealing to analytic truths about appearances fail.44

- 43. And this assumption is also not uncontroversial. Against Langton (1998), some commentators take empirical substances to be genuine substances. Cf. Watkins (2005). For discussion of the various phenomenalist and non-phenomenalist options available regarding the ontological status of appearances, see Stang (2016b).
- 44. The task remains to show why Kant holds that our knowledge is limited in

# V. From Noumenal-Grounding Ignorance to the Generic Grounding Interpretation

Numerical and kind ignorance entail that we lack knowledge of which features pertaining to (C1) and (C2) obtain between each appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it. But, as I argued in section III, such knowledge is necessary for knowing which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between an appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) grounding it. It follows that we are ignorant of, for each appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it, which specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between them. This consequence just is noumenal-grounding ignorance. Yet there are many metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations that suppose that we can know that one specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between things in themselves and appearances. But since knowing this is ruled out by noumenal-grounding ignorance, these metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations fail. For instance, noumenal-grounding ignorance rules out Langton's (1998) one-object interpretation, since she claims that we can know that one specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between things in themselves and appearances, viz. the non-causal relation between intrinsic and relational properties described at the end of section II. The same goes for a kind of two-object interpretation on which noumenal substances are causes of appearances.

With that said, there are versions of metaphysical one- and twoobject interpretations that are compatible with noumenal-grounding ignorance. We can call such interpretations *austere one-object* 

principle in such a way that things in themselves from various ontological categories and that stand in various numerical relations are equally apt (for all we know) for grounding appearances. I leave this task for further discussion elsewhere. Below, I will focus on investigating the consequences of this commitment for the one-object versus two-object debate. However, one upshot of the discussion here for this further task is that kind ignorance and numerical ignorance plausibly should be taken as *data* to be accommodated by any general account of why Kant thinks we are ignorant of things in themselves.

interpretations and austere two-object interpretations, respectively. The proponent of an austere one-object interpretation holds that we can know that some kind(s) of one-object material grounding relation(s) obtain between each appearance and the things in themselves grounding it; we just cannot know the specific kind of one-object relation obtaining between any individual appearance and its ground(s) among things in themselves. Mutatis mutandis for austere two-object interpretations. These austere interpretations make no claim about whether the kind(s) of relation(s) immediately obtaining between things in themselves and appearances is one-one, one/many-one, etc. They therefore do not violate numerical ignorance. These austere interpretations likewise make no claims about the kind(s) of things in themselves that immediately ground appearances (i.e. whether they are substances, accidents, etc.). They therefore do not violate kind ignorance. For instance, a proponent of an austere two-object interpretation might maintain that we can know that there is some specific kind of material constitution relation or other obtaining between things in themselves and appearances, i.e. one relating intrinsic properties and relational properties, and/or one relating relational properties and relational properties, and so on.<sup>45</sup>

To be sure, austere one- and two-object interpretations have the significant advantage over non-austere interpretations of being compatible with noumenal-grounding ignorance. However, their plausibility is undercut by the fact that it is unclear what could philosophically justify any austere *one*-object interpretation over any austere *two*-object interpretation (or *vice versa*). As we saw in the previous section, entities from various ontological categories and standing in various numerical relations to appearances seem to be equally apt (for all we know) for grounding appearances, for Kant. Similarly here, it seems that kinds of one- and two-object material grounding relations which are constitution-based, inherence-based, causation-based, etc. are all apt (for all we know) for being the kinds of relations through which

things in themselves ground appearances. For they are all kinds of material grounding relations through which the existence of something is determined. It is difficult to see what kind of story could allow proponents of austere one-object interpretations to rule out the epistemic possibility that some kind of *two*-object relation obtains between (at least some) things in themselves and appearances, and similarly for proponents of austere two-object interpretations to rule out the epistemic possibility that some kind of *one*-object relation obtains between (at least some) things in themselves and appearances. In the absence of such a story, both austere one-object interpretations and austere two-object interpretations fail. Of course, one might fall back on the textual evidence here to support an austere one-object interpretation or an austere two-object interpretation. But I will argue in the next section that the textual evidence can be read in a way that remains entirely neutral between one- and two-object interpretations.<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately, there is a metaphysical interpretation that does not face any of the difficulties associated with the various metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations explored above: *the generic grounding interpretation*. The generic grounding interpretation is the conjunction of the claims that (1) we can know that appearances are (somehow) materially grounded in one or more things in themselves, and (2) we cannot know by which specific kind(s) of *one- or two-object* material grounding relation(s) they are immediately related.<sup>47</sup> The ge-

- 46. Another sort of metaphysical interpretation (which is slightly different from the ones discussed above and my own preferred interpretation discussed below) is one that claims that we can know that certain appearances are immediately related to things in themselves by a one-object relation and that other appearances are immediately related to things in themselves by a two-object relation. But whatever kinds of appearances this interpretation would say are related to things in themselves by a one-object relation, it would have to be explained on what basis we can rule out the possibility that a two-object relation obtains instead (and *vice versa*). Although this sort of interpretation would need to be investigated more carefully elsewhere, it is not clear how such an explanation would go.
- 47. I restrict (2) to pertain to ignorance of the relationship between appearances and the things in themselves *immediately* grounding them. I want to leave open whether or not Kant thinks, for instance, that we can know that things

<sup>45.</sup> McDaniel (2015, 655–658) advances an austere interpretation along these lines.

neric grounding interpretation is neither a one-object interpretation nor a two-object interpretation, in that it entails that we are ignorant of whether each appearance and the thing in itself (or things in themselves) immediately grounding it are two metaphysical aspects of the same object or whether they correspond to two entirely distinct objects.

The generic grounding interpretation avoids the problems associated with the above (non-austere and austere) one- and two-object interpretations, since it simply concedes that we have no basis for knowing which specific kind(s) of *one- or two-object* material grounding relation(s) immediately obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances. The fact that the generic grounding interpretation avoids these problems strongly supports attributing it to Kant. Indeed, some commentators have already expressed sympathy for something like the generic grounding interpretation.<sup>48</sup> Yet my case here provides a basis for it in specific aspects of Kant's doctrine of noumenal ignorance and his account of grounding.

Admittedly, Kant never states the generic grounding interpretation explicitly. But if he were committed to the generic grounding interpretation and therefore not committed to either a metaphysical one- or two-object view, one would reasonably expect him to be ambiguous about whether we can know that things in themselves immediately ground appearances via a one-object relation or via a two-object relation. And Kant is indeed ambiguous about this, even though he repeatedly asserts the more general claim that things in themselves ground appearances. The proponent of the generic grounding interpretation has a plausible explanation for this ambiguity: Kant does not think that we can know which specific kind(s) of *one- or two-*object relation(s) obtain between things in themselves and appearances. In

in themselves must ultimately bottom out in one or more ungrounded substances. While I have doubts that this sort of position is really tenable given our ignorance of things in themselves, I recognize that it would take further work to undermine it.

48. Cf. Adams (1997, 824) and Walker (2010).

other words, the textual ambiguity concerning whether Kant holds a one- or two-object view is explained by the hypothesis that he thinks we can know only *that* appearances are materially grounded in things in themselves, but not more specific claims about *how* appearances are materially grounded in things in themselves.<sup>49</sup>

With that said, the generic grounding interpretation does not claim that there are no knowable constraints on which specific kinds of material grounding relations can obtain between things in themselves and appearances. For instance, in his response to Eberhard, Kant emphatically denies that things in themselves could ever ground appearances by being proper parts of appearances.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, according to the generic grounding interpretation, our epistemic default should be to take any specific kind of material grounding relation as a prima facie live option for characterizing the relationship between things in themselves and appearances. That is, it should be taken as a live option until other Kantian commitments show why that option has to be ruled out. But what remains doubtful (given the above considerations against one- and two-object interpretations) is that (a) we can narrow down the range of live options to only kinds of one-object relations or to only kinds of two-object relations, and that (b) we can ascertain which specific kind(s) of material grounding relation(s) immediately obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances.<sup>51</sup>

- 49. One might alternatively suggest that Kant simply regards it as obvious which specific kind(s) of material grounding relation(s) obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances. But part of my project here has been precisely to undermine the assumption that this is obvious, given how many specific kinds of material grounding relations Kant countenances, as well as the various noumenal ignorance theses he endorses. This supports thinking that Kant also does not take this to be obvious.
- 50. Cf. AK 8:207–209. In short, Kant thinks that appearances are only ever divisible into further appearances never into things in themselves. Cf. A523–530/B551–558. This point illustrates that we cannot simply read off the kinds of grounding relations that obtain between things in themselves and appearances from the kinds of grounding relations that obtain among appearances (e.g. proper parthood).
- 51. A further development of the generic grounding interpretation (one that I will leave for exploration elsewhere) would be to show why Kant thinks that

#### VI. Two Worries Addressed

So far, I have presented a case for ascribing both noumenal-grounding ignorance and the generic grounding interpretation to Kant. In this section, I want to consider two worries about these claims. The first worry is that the components of the generic grounding interpretation stand in tension with each other; our lack of knowledge of which specific kind(s) of one- or two-object grounding relation(s) obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances undermines our knowledge that there are things in themselves grounding appearances at all (per the transcendental grounding thesis). Compounding this worry is the fact that some of Kant's arguments for the transcendental grounding thesis are often taken to support a one-object interpretation. To help alleviate this worry, I will sketch how one of Kant's arguments for this thesis is compatible with the generic grounding interpretation — one that is usually taken to support a one-object interpretation. In doing so, we will also see how Kant is still in a position to defend the claim that appearances are grounded in things in themselves, even if we lack knowledge of how appearances are grounded in things in themselves.

Kant says in the B edition Preface to the *Kritik* that there must be things in themselves, lest "there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears" (Bxxvi-Bxxvii). This highly condensed argument is often taken to support a one-object interpretation, in part because Kant says that appearances are appearances of something that appears. <sup>52</sup> However, this argument can be read in a way that remains neutral on the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances, as follows: Kant can be read above as claiming that (1) an appearance is, by nature, always an appearance of

we cannot *in principle* know further constraints on the nature of the grounding of appearances by things in themselves, and hence why (a) and (b) lie permanently beyond our epistemic reach.

52. Cf. Langton (1998) and Allais (2015).

something (albeit perhaps not just of a single something). But (2) given that an appearance is an appearance of something, its existence must somehow be grounded in whatever it is an appearance of. From here, the final premise is that (3) something that appears ultimately itself is (or at least implicates) one or more things in themselves. In effect, there cannot just be appearances of further appearances ad infinitum. It follows from (1)–(3) that every appearance must ultimately be grounded in one or more things in themselves.

Some form of premises (1) and (3) will plausibly also have to be adopted by proponents of metaphysical one-object interpretations in their reconstruction of this argument. And nothing about premises (1) and (3) forces us to take a stance on the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances. Crucially, however, premise (2) on the above reconstruction simply leaves open whether appearances are grounded in *what they are appearances of* by a one-object relation or by a two-object relation. But many proponents of metaphysical one-object interpretations will take issue with this, since they see Kant's argument above as asserting that a one-object relation obtains between appearances and their grounds among things in themselves.

Yet premise (2) seems quite plausible, philosophically speaking. Consider two other classes of entities involving a distinction between appearances and what they are appearances of: shadows and holes. Intuitively, shadows are *appearances of* something else, and holes likewise *appear in* something else. The fact that both shadows and holes are appearances of (or *in*) something provides support for thinking that they must be somehow grounded in what they are appearances of. But are shadows and holes a different metaphysical aspect of what they are appearances of, or are they entirely distinct entities altogether? This is a contentious issue.<sup>53</sup> Yet this further issue plausibly is not settled by the mere fact that shadows and holes are appearances of (or *in*) something, and hence grounded in the latter.

53. See Casati and Varzi (2014) for an overview of the contemporary literature on the ontology of holes. And, of course, there are other positions one might take on the ontology of shadows and holes.

The case of shadows and holes supports a parallel conclusion for appearances. The fact that appearances are appearances of something supports the modest (but substantive) conclusion that they must be grounded in whatever they are appearances of. Yet, as in the former two cases, this simply leaves unsettled the further issue of how appearances are grounded, i.e. whether by some kind(s) of one-object relation(s) or by some kind(s) of two-object relation(s). Hence, Kant's argument at Bxxvi-Bxxvii can plausibly be read as not addressing the one- or two-object issue at all; he is simply providing an argument for the more general conclusion that appearances are grounded in things in themselves. To be sure, a full defense of the premises of this argument still needs to be provided. But the upshot is that explaining our knowledge of the transcendental grounding thesis given our ignorance of the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances seems promising, as we have seen how one of Kant's arguments for this thesis can plausibly be read as remaining entirely neutral regarding the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances.<sup>54</sup>

A second worry about the generic grounding interpretation is that there are passages in which Kant might be read as transgressing the very epistemic limits that the generic grounding interpretation claims he adheres to. For instance, Marshall (2013b) argues for a metaphysical

54. One might still have reservations about the plausibility of this reconstruction of Kant's argument, since he also describes the distinction between things in themselves and appearances in the same passage as follows: "Now if we were to assume that the distinction between things as objects of experience and the very same things as things in themselves, which our critique has made necessary [...]" (Bxxvii). This description of objects of experience as "the very same things" as things in themselves appears to support a one-object interpretation. Van Cleve (1999, 143-146) offers an interesting alternative reading of this sort of locution that does not require a one-object interpretation. For instance, he notes that Kant's predecessors (e.g. Locke and Berkeley) use similar locutions in certain cases, despite not obviously endorsing a one-object view in those cases. Moreover, I will argue below that Kant often makes claims about things in themselves that do not amount to knowledge claims, and which are therefore compatible with the generic grounding interpretation. This strategy can also be applied to this passage. For Kant explicitly talks here in terms of assuming that things in themselves are the very same things as objects of experience, rather than *knowing* this.

one-object interpretation of transcendental idealism on the basis that Kant repeatedly suggests that every human agent is constituted by one self (i.e. one subject) with two characters, viz. an empirical character and a noumenal character — rather than by two distinct selves. Marshall cites many passages throughout Kant's corpus articulating this point, such as the following:

for a subject of the world of sense we would have first an empirical character [...] one would also have to allow [einräumen müssen] this subject an intelligible character, through which it is indeed the cause of those actions as appearances, but which does not stand under any conditions of sensibility and is not itself appearance. The first one could call the character of such a thing in appearance, the second its character as a thing in itself. (A539/B567)

In this passage, Kant says that we have to *allow* (i.e. in the sense of *concede*) that the self is constituted by an empirical character and a noumenal (intelligible) character. On this basis, one might be tempted to conclude that Kant holds that we can *know* that this claim holds. But this would entail that we can know, in at least some cases, that a one-object relation obtains between things in themselves and appearances — *pace* the generic grounding interpretation.

In response, however, note that Kant does not explicitly claim in the above passage that we can know that *every human agent is constituted by one self that has a noumenal character and an empirical character.* He only says that we must *concede* that this is true. This sort of phrasing can be contrasted with the phrasing he uses in paradigmatic articulations of the transcendental grounding thesis. Kant does not merely say at A537/B565 (quoted above in section I) that things in themselves *must be conceded* as grounds of appearances, but rather that appearances *must have* things in themselves as grounds. At A696/B724, Kant asserts even more strongly that it is "without a doubt" [*ohne Zweifel*] that appearances have at least one transcendental ground. Kant's weaker phrasing in the passages cited by Marshall can therefore be read as

indicating that the positive propositional attitude that Kant endorses with respect to the above italicized proposition about the self falls short of knowledge. 55 While this is not a knockdown argument that Kant is not making knowledge claims in such passages, it does show that he need not be interpreted in this stronger way.

Supposing that Kant is not making knowledge claims in such passages, what weaker propositional attitude could he think is permissible to bear towards the above italicized proposition about the self? Given that Kant describes this proposition as one that we *have to concede* above, one weaker propositional attitude he might have in mind is *assumption* [*Annehmung*]. For Kant, certain propositions should be assumed by rational agents as true — even if they lack knowledge of them. So it may be that we should *assume* that the two-character view of the self is correct, rather than assuming that there are coordinated but distinct noumenal and empirical selves.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, the former model of the self does seem to enjoy certain theoretical virtues over the latter model. For instance, the latter model posits more distinct selves than the former, and hence is less parsimonious. The latter model is also less attractive in that it must posit some mechanism through which the noumenal self is coordinated with a distinct empirical self. Perhaps these theoretical virtues of the former model warrant assuming that it is correct, for Kant. But such theoretical virtues plausibly do not enable us to know that the former model is correct. For Kant suggests (e.g. at A682–684/B710–712) that they likewise do not enable us to know that the self involves a simple (rather

than composite) substance. Moreover, as Marshall rightly notes, Kant also claims that the two-character view of the self is important for making sense of certain moral duties (e.g. at AK 6:418–419). Yet whatever propositions about the metaphysical constitution of the self we should assume for practical reasons will likewise fall short of being known to be true.<sup>57</sup>

The upshot here is that Kant may reasonably be interpreted in the above passages cited by Marshall as holding that every human agent is constituted by one self that has a noumenal character and an empirical character is a proposition that we should assume as being true, even though we lack knowledge of it. And crucially, the generic grounding interpretation merely entails that we lack knowledge of which specific kind(s) of material grounding relation(s) immediately obtain(s) between things in themselves and appearances. It says nothing about whether or not it is permissible to bear some positive propositional attitude falling short of knowledge towards such claims. Hence, assuming that at least some appearances are related to things in themselves by a kind of one-object relation is entirely compatible with the generic grounding interpretation. This extends to the self. It is just that we cannot rule out (as an epistemic possibility) that human agents are instead constituted by coordinated but distinct noumenal and empirical selves.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55.</sup> Indeed, the above passage is one of the more favorable passages for Marshall's interpretation. Some of the other passages which Marshall cites are more open to other readings, e.g. Bxxvi–Bxxvii (see my alternative reading above). And yet other passages occur in the context of Kant's practical philosophy, where it is doubtful that knowledge is at stake to begin with, e.g. AK 5:161–162 and AK 6:418–419. More generally, Kant does not explicitly claim in any of the passages cited by Marshall that we can *know* that human agents are each constituted by one self with two characters.

<sup>56.</sup> See Chignell (2007) and Stang (2016a) for further discussion of Kant's notion of assumption (also translated as 'acceptance'), as well as other kinds of propositional attitudes falling short of knowledge that Kant employs.

<sup>57.</sup> The one exception here among the ideas of speculative reason (which Kant explicitly identifies as an exception) is *freedom*. Kant claims in the second *Critique* at AK 5:4 that we can know [wissen] the possibility of freedom a priori. But this claim involves practical (rather than theoretical) knowledge. For Kant's justification for this claim involves the claim that freedom is the ground [ratio essendi] of the moral law. The generic grounding interpretation should be seen as concerning theoretical knowledge, rather than practical knowledge. For further discussion of Kant on practical knowledge of freedom, see Hogan (2013).

<sup>58.</sup> Note that Kant's statement that "it is obvious that the subject of inherence is designated only transcendentally through the I that is appended to thoughts, without noting the least property of it, or cognizing or knowing [wissen] anything at all [überhaupt] about it" (A355) likewise need not be read as claiming we can know that some inherence relation obtains between thoughts and their ground(s). This passage may rather be read as presupposing that we are warranted in assuming that the relation is one of inherence (which, recall, is a

Now, admittedly, Kant makes other claims concerning the nature of things in themselves that may seem to be incompatible with noumenal-grounding ignorance. To take one other example: he claims in many of his metaphysics lectures that the noumenal world consists of many noumenal substances standing in causal relations to one another.<sup>59</sup> If Kant is really asserting that we can know that things in themselves meet this description, this would cast some doubt on the idea that he endorses noumenal-grounding ignorance. For if he re-ally allows that we can know which specific kinds of grounding re-lations things in themselves stand in to one another (e.g. reciprocal causal relations), it is not a stretch of the imagination to think that he would also allow that we can also know the specific kind(s) of mate-rial grounding relation(s) immediately obtaining between things in themselves and appearances. Fortunately, it is not necessary to inter-pret passages in which Kant makes such claims as asserting that we can know that things in themselves are characterized in these ways. I will briefly sketch out two alternative ways of interpreting these sorts of claims here.

One strategy is to concede that Kant is indeed putting forth exis-tential claims about things in themselves in some of these passages, but nonetheless to insist that the propositional attitude he thinks that we should bear towards these propositions falls short of knowledge. We just saw how this strategy can be employed with respect to Kant's views on the self.

Another strategy is to interpret Kant as simply providing conceptual clarification in certain passages, rather than as making existential one-object relation), for reasons similar to those just discussed above. Moreover, Kant might be speaking in terms of a *subject of inherence* here because, within this context, he is engaging with the traditional metaphysician, who accepts the claim that there is such a subject. He might therefore just be presupposing this claim to level a further criticism, viz. that even if there is a subject of inherence, we cannot know whether it is a substance, rather than an accident.

59. Among other places, see AK 28:195–197, AK 29:852–853, and AK 29:1006–1008.

claims. Along these lines, Kant can be interpreted above as just clarifying what our concept of the noumenal world consists in, without claiming that we can know that something corresponds to this concept. To take another example, consider Kant's remark in the Amphiboly that if I "restrict myself solely to the concept of a thing in general, then I abstract from every outer relation, and yet there must remain a concept of it, that signifies no relation but merely inner determinations" (A282/ B338). This passage is taken by Langton (1998) and Allais (2015) to support the view that things in themselves are the intrinsic properties ("inner determinations") of substances. While this passage may provide prima facie textual evidence for their view, it can be plausibly read in a different way. First, this passage comes from the Amphiboly, where it is not always clear where Kant is expressing his own view and where he is merely reporting on the commitments of the Leibnizian view that he is criticizing. More importantly, note that Kant is first and foremost explicating the concept of a thing in general in this passage. It is by no means clear that the concept of a thing in general (as Kant characterizes it here) is the same as (or bears an analytic relationship to) the concept of a thing in itself. Indeed, Kant never similarly characterizes the concept of a thing in itself as something consisting of merely inner determinations. Kant therefore need not be interpreted in this passage (and others like it) as asserting that there exists anything corresponding to the concept of a thing in general. Rather, he can be interpreted as merely explicating the concept of a thing in general.<sup>60</sup> And given the textual and systematic reasons in favor of attributing kind ignorance to Kant laid out in section IV, this interpretation seems to be more plausible.

In short, there seem to be (at least) two viable strategies for interpreting Kant's claims about things in themselves that may otherwise appear to violate the generic grounding interpretation. The first strategy is to interpret the propositional attitude that we should bear towards such claims as falling short of knowledge. The second strategy

<sup>60.</sup> For Kant's discussion of the regulative use of this concept, see A670–671/B698–699.

is to interpret such claims as primarily providing conceptual clarification. Deciding which of these two strategies to apply will come down to the specifics of the individual claim in question. But these two strategies, it seems, should be exhausted before ascribing to Kant the very strong position that we can know claims that violate the generic grounding interpretation. For not only would ascribing such knowledge claims conflict with other passages where Kant seems to deny that such knowledge is available to us, but it would also raise the difficult question of what could possibly justify such knowledge claims.

#### VII. Conclusion

Many proponents of metaphysical one- and two-object interpretations of transcendental idealism claim that we can know that one specific kind of material grounding relation obtains between things in themselves and appearances. But upon closer investigation of Kant's overarching account of grounding, we have seen that he is plausibly taken to deny this claim. In light of this commitment, I have argued that an interpretation on which we can know that appearances are grounded in things in themselves but not which specific kind(s) of *one- or two-* object material grounding relation(s) obtain(s) between them proves to be the most plausible metaphysical interpretation regarding the distinctness of things in themselves and appearances. Given that this is correct, both prevailing kinds of metaphysical interpretations regarding their distinctness — viz. one-object interpretations and two-object interpretations — should be rejected as transgressing the limits of our knowledge of things in themselves.

#### **Works Cited**

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. (1997). "Things in Themselves". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57:4, 801–825.
- Allais, Lucy. (2015). *Manifest Reality: Kant's Idealism and his Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allison, Henry E. (2004). Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation

- and Defense. Revised and Enlarged Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ameriks, Karl. (2003). *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, R. Lanier. (2015). *The Poverty of Conceptual Truth: Kant's Analytic/Synthetic Distinction and the Limits of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Karen. (2017). *Making Things Up*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Casati, Roberto and Varzi, Achille. (2014). "Holes". *The Stanford Ency-clopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/holes/">http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/holes/</a>>.
- Chignell, Andrew. (2007). "Kant's Concepts of Justification". *Noûs* 41:1, 33–63.
  - (2014). "Modal Motivations for Noumenal Ignorance: Knowledge, Cognition, and Coherence". *Kant-Studien* 105:4, 573–597.
- Crusius, Christian August. (1745). Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten. Leipzig.
- Fine, Kit. (2001). "The Question of Realism". *Philosophers' Imprint* 1:1, 1–30.
- Hogan, Desmond. (2013). "Metaphysical Motives of Kant's Analytic-Synthetic Distinction". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51:2, 267–307.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1902—). *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by the Berlin-Brandenburg (formerly Royal Prussian) Academy of Sciences. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
  - (1997). *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (ed. and trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (ed. and trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - (2002). *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Henry Allison, Peter Heath, Gary Hatfield, and Michael Friedman (ed. and trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kreines, James. (2016). "Things in Themselves and Metaphysical

- Grounding: On Allais' Manifest Reality". *European Journal of Philosophy* 24:1, 253–266.
- Langton, Rae. (1998). *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  - (2006). "Kant's Phenomena: Extrinsic or Relational Properties? A Reply to Allais". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73:1, 170–185.
- Longuenesse, Béatrice. (2005). *Kant on the Human Standpoint*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marshall, Colin. (2010). "Kant's Metaphysics of the Self". *Philosophers' Imprint* 10:8, 1–21.
  - (2013a). "Kant's Appearances and Things in Themselves as Qua-Objects". *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63:252, 520–545.
  - (2013b). "Kant's One Self and the Appearance/Thing-in-Itself Distinction". *Kant-Studien* 104:4, 421–441.
- McDaniel, Kris. (2015). "A Philosophical Model of the Relation between Things in Themselves and Appearances". *Noûs* 49:4, 643–664.
- Messina, James. (2017). "The Relationship between Space and Mutual Interaction: Kant contra Newton and Leibniz". *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47:1, 43–65.
- Proops, Ian. (2010). "Kant's First Paralogism". *The Philosophical Review* 119:4, 449–495.
- Rosen, Gideon (2010). "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction". In Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 109–136.
- Schaffer, Jonathan. (2009). "On What Grounds What". In David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (eds.), *Metameta-physics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 347–383.
- Stang, Nicholas F. (2014). "The Non-Identity of Appearances and Things in Themselves". *Noûs* 48:1, 106–136.
  - (2016a). *Kant's Modal Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (2016b). "Kant's Transcendental Idealism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta

- (ed.), <a href="https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/">https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/</a>>.
- Strawson, P.F. (1966). The Bounds of Sense. London: Methuen.
- Van Cleve, James. (1999). *Problems from Kant*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walker, Ralph C.S. (2010). "Kant on the Number of Worlds". *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18:5, 821–843.
- Watkins, Eric. (2005). *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watkins, Eric, and Willaschek, Marcus. (2017a). "Kant's Account of Cognition". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55:1, 83–112. (2017b). "Kant on Cognition and Knowledge". *Synthese*.





#### **ARTICLE**

Received 28 Sep 2015 | Accepted 17 Nov 2015 | Published 15 Dec 2015

DOI: 10.1057/palcomms.2015.43

**OPEN** 

# The passing of the peace: the ascension and the death of God

Christopher Rodkey<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT** Is peace possible within a radical Christian perspective? This essay seeks to explore a radicalized notion of peace, an investigation that will also radicalize the doctrine of the ascension of Christ. To do so I begin with Paul Tillich, as a proto-radical theologian, and his understanding of peace, and point to its inadequacies, that is, namely, that Tillich assumes a universalized peace in an epoch yet to come, a peace that is hoped for without an actual faith in this peace. Second, drawing upon the radical theology of Thomas J J Altizer, a radical Christology that places exigency upon the presence of Jesus after the resurrection, as the Pauline "first fruits" or understanding or "Post-Christ", will emerge. A radical understanding of the ascension will usher a new understanding of peace for the church in a Pentecost age. This article is published as part of a collection dedicated to radical theologies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Dallastown, USA

It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land Egypt that night ... on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord.... This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. (Exodus 12:11b-12, 14a NRSV)

hroughout this investigation I rely upon resources within the radical theology tradition—for example, Mary Daly, DG Leahy, Peter Rollins, Slavoj Žižek—and employ their terminology and ideas both directly and indirectly. As someone who believes that theology is only radical when put into practice, and as my primary site of practice is the church, I intend my tone to be homiletic and to engage a practitioner within the context of liturgical expression. As such, I begin with a discussion of Tillich, who similarly understood his work as "on the boundary" between church and academy, and that the doing of theology occurs within the nexus of the two.

Tillich (1990) preached that Christians have a right to peace, as a right to believe in an "ultimate hope", even as we simultaneously experience the demonic with the holy all around us. This hope is neither entirely wrapped up in a religious belief in an afterlife, where God finally grants us peace, nor is it a hope beyond a human conception of time. Rather, this peace is a "hope for return to the eternal from which it comes"; this peace is not a heaven beyond space and time, but a return to being-itself: not distant or even in another dimension, but deeply and ontologically present in the immediate reality of the Now. Such hope, says Tillich, gives us "assurance" and a "deeper and more real" participation into what concerns us ultimately. Finally, as this hope gives us peace we should be mindful, Tillich proclaimed, that the hope for life within the eternal is not peace unless it is understood as a universal gift to humanity. Otherwise hope is "poor and foolish", and is not genuinely peace (Tillich, 1990, p. 190). Our lives have a purpose of building the Kingdom of God in the present and immediate world, and not for the security of a real estate market beyond our dimension of reality.

Tillich (1990, p. 180) elsewhere wrote, in a response to Pope John XXIII's encyclical, Pacem in Terris, that world peace may be attained through the development of technology, even as this technology appeals to our existentially demonic nature. Here Tillich reveals his Idealist roots, yet he remains a twentiethcentury humanist and existentialist, writing that "there is no hope for a final stage of history in which peace and justice rule ... we cannot hope for a final stage of justice and peace within human history; but we can hope for partial victories over the forces of evil in a particular moment in time" (p. 181). Tillich here implies that in the future there will be a "final stage of history", a utopia initiated when God finally overcomes human evil and intervenes in the establishment of a new era of peace. And here lies a tension in much liberal Christian theology, that the hope for peace and justice must happen now because God does not intervene in the Now beyond our hands and faces, but yet there is also always for the liberal a hope and expectation of this final intervention of the divine working from outside of history.

A radical Christian approach to Tillich must grapple with the nondiachronal nature of Tillich's conception of God, and Tillich's theology of peace is rooted in a belief in a metaphysical God that primarily stands *above* and *beside* history, rather than participating *in* history. Tillich may believe that God transforms the world, but when human acts work for justice these acts are not really the full work of deity in the world, but a small gesture of that God. To be sure, this is Mary Daly's critique of Tillich, namely, that Tillich points towards the possibility of a radicalized notion of divinity but never fully actualizes it in his thought. In other words, the lack of perpetual self-transcendence, what Tillich calls

the "power of being", implies that hope cannot be *truly* hopeful by an individual apart from the species. While Tillich's notion of universal gift is appreciated by the reader: the absence of the possibility for the minority hope for *Parousia*, or second coming, within the economy of hope falls outside of the boundaries of Biblical Christianity on all accounts.

This leads to a second criticism regarding Tillich's non-diachronal God, namely, that the divine on the whole does not radically change with regard to the Christ, or his second coming. The power or motion of being might change, or change somewhat within the totality of the whole, but the being of God is not self-negating or fundamentally changing. God changes, Tillich believes, but it is a limited change established by human categories and conceptions. This change is *change that can be believed in*, to steal a popular cliché, as Tillich's conception of God does not allow for the incarnation of Christ to fundamentally change Godhead itself, but rather the Christ changes how being-itself or *esse-ipsum* is known to us and how we may participate in the ground of being.

The fundamental moment of divine change for Tillich, the Christ or the "Christ-event" is more of a theological anthropology than an actual metaphysics. "Christ" is just as much of a change for God as it is for humanity, but its meaning is defined and understood within human terms and conventions. Before Christ and after Christ the metaphysics of the divine more or less remain the same. God, of the "Power of Being" has the capacity to change humans and human situations, but this is at once understood as operating from a perspective of *deus ex machina*, as well as from the standpoint of human action. An interventionist deity, Peter Rollins observes, is a concept of God "introduced into the world on our terms in order to resolve a problem" and "simply justifies our beliefs and helps us sleep comfortably at night" (Rollins, 2011). If this deity offers peace in an arbitrary manner, this peace is an illusion or a conception that is self-serving.

Tillich's language about peace and how God operates in a relationship with humanity seems to be what Daly (1978) calls "doublespeak", wanting God to be thought of as a transformative mechanism of being in the world. But a limit is implied, with the possibility of final peace in an act of divine intervention by a transcendent being acting outside of the dimension of reality in which we live. To these ends, we may ask whether peace is something genuinely hoped for even as its reality is quite distant from the present? Or, whether peace is simply an esoteric matter relegated only to those who choose to think this far through Christian theology, an idea that tickles the utopian neo-liberal imagination, but can have no true actuality in the world if its peace does not come with an actual New Creation Now Occurring. Yet human empowerment to bring about peace is irrelevant if we are not truly invited or lured to become co-creators of the Now, or if the possibility of human empowerment towards peace is futile, as it historically stands up against a final act of the divine that would always seem to be not-yet.

#### **Radical Christology**

Radical theologian Thomas Altizer departs from Tillich on many points, but the above points on God are essential for understanding how to move beyond the liberal–existential Christianity of Tillich towards a genuine radical Christian theology. For Altizer, Godhead in the present may only be conceived as an apocalyptic Godhead in the Now, perpetually disclosing and negating Godself. The history of Godhead disclosed through scripture is the history of the death of God, culminating for Christian scripture in the resurrection of Christ, when Godhead is universally and kenotically released into human flesh.<sup>2</sup> In this enfleshment Godhead has descended into Hell, as it has

descended into Hell before, and the emptiness of the present "is open to an ultimate transfiguration". This transfiguration cannot be separated from the divine apocalyptic history of the incarnation, death, descent into Hell and resurrection of Christ (Altizer, 2003).

Altizer's Christological logic—which follows incarnation, death, descent into Hell and resurrection—follows the religious logic of the coincidentia oppositorum, or the coincidence of opposites.<sup>3</sup> For Altizer, the apocalypse of Godhead follows a forward and downward movement into creation, and ultimately into human flesh with the incarnation of Christ. During the life of Christ, the ministry and crucifixion of God continues a forward and downward movement into history, and changing at every turn. Following the death of God upon the cross, the body of Jesus is entombed, and Jesus descends into Hell. At this very bottom point of forward and downward movement, God continues to move into the resurrection of Jesus, thereby unleashing the divine into human flesh as the resurrection glorifies the depths of humanity. The move from Hell to resurrection is purely symbolic, understood as forward and downward because of the enfleshment of the divine upon all people; in other words, Jesus' resurrection is not just Jesus', but rather it is the resurrection of everyone, by virtue of the crucifixion and suffering of humanity. The logic is not always clear and clean, and is easily manipulated, but should not be taken so literally as it is disclosing the logic of Godhead, a God whose logic is full of surprises and double meanings, as in the case of Godhead diachronically emptying itself into human flesh through Christ.

What is absent from the way in which Altizer has typically described his Christology is the ministry and Jesus' suffering prior to death, which are both occurrences during Jesus' temporal life and the burial of Christ following his death. There are clues to interpret these ideas in Altizer's thought, namely, that these are consistent with the kenotic movement of Godhead into flesh, and suggest forward and downward movement. A Biblical reading of Christ will demonstrate this logic; for example, the dove descending onto Christ at the moment of baptism might suggest an upward movement in terms of traditional Christological thinking (as in, "high" or "low" Christology), but the language of the Bible is a *descent*. Divine healing acts suggest a "high" Christology, but the healing act privileges the poor and indicates a social reversal at work. Christ's preaching suggests a high authority, but the oppressed are prioritized in the Beatitudes.

Altizer has claimed that the ascension of Christ does not fit with the logic of Godhead, the coincidentia oppositorum.<sup>4</sup> Further, Altizer has even stated that the ascension is a symbol of an apprehension against true eschatological rendering of the Gospel; so we can argue that the concept of ascension in any literal sense has a purpose of obfuscating the final act of God from transcendence to enfleshment (Altizer, 1970). It should be recalled that the ascension is not a Pauline idea in the scriptures, but it is hinted in the longer ending of Mark and in the Luke-Acts Continuum. We know from Irenaeus (c. 180) in Against Heresies that some Gnostics believed the ascension of Christ to have occurred as late as 18 months following the resurrection, even though some other non-canonical texts (most famously the Apocryphon of James) make no mention at all of the ascension (Irenaeus, Against Heresies). Today the ascension is part of the Western and Eastern liturgical traditions and is doctrinally accepted by most Protestants. At the same time, the ascension is one of the least-discussed and perhaps least-believed elements of Christian doctrine within mainstream Christianity, and its scriptural resources are clearly suspicious or ambiguous, especially given Paul's silence on the matter. For Altizer, any historical or literal understanding of the ascension, as with the resurrection, is an apprehension of the forward and downward movement of Godhead,

and it would seem that the ascension is an invention of the early church to reject the actual kenotic movement of Spirit into flesh at the event of the resurrection.

Other radical Christologies reject the ascension as well, even if their rejection is implicit. Zižek (2000), for example, writes in *The Ticklish Subject* that "what ultimately matters is only the resurrection of the dead Christ signaling that each human being can be redeemed and can enter the domain of Eternal Life, that is, participate in the Truth-Event". Žižek's (2009) most recent work, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, points towards Altzier as the only possible Christian theology following the death of God. For Žižek, radical theology points towards a resurrection of materiality in the resurrection of Christ; but for Altizer, such a belief hinges upon a literal certainty in the resurrection. Instead, the main event of Christology is in the death of God on the cross, Good Friday; anything beyond that is symbolic and is indicative of how an authentic life is lived, that is, the crucified life, in the shadow of Good Friday.

I take issue with Žižek's Christology in his language of the dead Christ. The post-resurrection Christ might have been a post-death Jesus, but Jesus is also post-burial and post-Hell, if one is to adhere to the progression of traditional Christology. Following the death of Jesus on the cross, "human death" in a subjective sense no longer applies to him, as Godhead in Christ diachronally transfigures; the hypostasis has imploded. As such, Luther's Christological notion of *communicatio idiomantum* is no longer occurring in the post-resurrection image of Christ, as Christ initiates the New Creation with his own resurrection (Depoortere, 2008). I am careful not to describe Christ as a supreme superhero at this point—which is the image I retain of Christ from learning the ascension on flannelgraph as a child, where Jesus just levitates away—but the Post-Christ is, as Luke describes, "carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50).

By "Post-Christ" I refer to the reality of Jesus following the resurrection, what Paul named the "first fruit" (1 Cor. 15:20) of the transitional period between the resurrection and, later, the ascension followed by Pentecost: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands the kingdom of God to the Father" (1 Cor. 15:23-24b) (Altizer, 1970). This scriptural language is important: if the resurrection is not a final pouring out of Godhead into human flesh, the Post-Christ would not need to be carried away, he would just levitate back to the Triune Father in the sky. The flesh of the Post-Christ is banal flesh; it must be carried away.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Post-Christ and the ascension

With the arrival of the first fruits of the Post-Christ and the New Creation with the event of resurrection, old thinking about the divine must transfigure, as the Christ-event has fundamentally changed any conception of God in such a cataclysmic fashion that a new post-temple epoch may be conceived. After all, "death" is an "impossible" concept for the Post-Christ, according to the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2:24. We should recall that in the apocalypse of 2 Baruch, after the destruction of the first temple, the angels inhabited the real, spiritual temple. Given Luke's nostalgia for the recently destroyed second temple, could it be possible that the ascension is a ritual exercise recalling the posttemple apocalypse of 2 Baruch? (Swanson, 2007). Even though the ascension is an upward movement, it is an ascension into a temporally destroyed temple, an apocalyptic ascension in a postresurrection world that is a final symbolic movement of an actual dissolution of Godhead into flesh. In other words, the former temples—whether inhabited by the priests or the angels, or by God for that matter—are no longer necessary because the body of

Christ is now actually present. That is, actually present where two or more are gathered.

Turning to the Deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, the Post-Christ is described as having "put all things under his feet" and been "made ... the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22–23). Although "Paul" speaks of these in "the age to come" (1:21), the Gospel and apocalyptic narratives place this authority in the present. Returning to the authentic Pauline epistles, again we find that Christ is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28): a total presence, remaining fully divine as entangled enfleshment (Altizer, 1970).

A radical Christology must recognize that, as mentioned earlier, the ministry of Jesus formally begins with the tearing open of sky at his baptism, with Spirit descending "upon him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3:22).6 The Christ narrative concludes (as the Luke chapter of the Luke-Acts continuum ends) with the tearing open of sky again with the post-resurrection Post-Christ being carried away. The popular Jewish metaphysics of the time that understood the sky as an impenetrable limit should not be ignored in these images (Swanson, 2007, p. 44). In both of these moments the breeching of Absolute Hymen-to employ DG Leahy's terminology—in the act of creation is recalled, but metaphysics itself is challenged as a consequence of the death of God. As such the ascension is simultaneously a descent into Hell, transfiguring any remnant of the Pre-Christ notion of static, nondiachronal Godhead (Leahy, 1996). The ascension of the Post-Christ christens the new Christs; the ascension prepares the newly enfleshed for Christic anointing.

#### Pentecost and the passing of the peace

To follow this theology, the Day of Pentecost is again the tearing open of sky, the kenotic filling of Spirit, speaking with "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:1ff.). On Pentecost the hymenic sky is not closed, but open—only for downward movement of Spirit. The Church of the New Creation Now Occurring, which begins at the Day of Pentecost, tastes the abysmal openness and vacuousity of transcendence with tongues of fire as the Holy Spirit descends upon the Church. This continual downward movement, Luke tells us, is a "violent" act (Acts 2:2).

If the Church of the New Creation Now Occurring, a Pentecosting Church, is filled with tongues of fire, can there truly be peace? First, Luke makes clear that the Pentecost is universal to the *hexity*, or multiplicity, of the Church, but not necessarily universal to humanity as the universal gift of which Tillich spoke. Second, the divinity of this Church of the New Creation is enfleshed and is not metaphysically transcendent. As a community, this Church may anthropologically understand itself as self-transcending in the Tillichian sense, but transcendence remains a trace of the forward and downward movement, culminating in the resurrection of the Christ and the ascension of the Post-Christ. The Church diachronically occurs after the Post-Christ; the Church exists contingently upon the presence of the Holy Spirit, a wind or breath speaking out of the nothing of false pentecosts happening around us.

Third, a radical Pentecosting church thrives on hope, that is, hope for an actual *parousia*, and hope against all odds. This hope is neither, as Tillich implies, an esoteric hope nor a hope for which its belief is strengthened by its un-believability. Rather, it is an *extraordinary* hope that is impossible apart from the reality of a final and ultimate joy. This eucatastrophic hope is one that grafts the individual into the apocalyptic history of Godhead, as an apocalyptic individual in Paul's epistolary historiography of Galatians, but also an ecclesiastical hope modelled upon the hope for Pentecost following the ascension. This is to say, such extraordinary hope is a hope for perpetual Pentecosting.

Is peace then possible in a radical Christian theology? Peace, in the intransitive sense, as *silence*, is possible, but this is only as the negation of Pentecosting tongues of fire. The practice of peace within radical liturgical environments is, however, essential for the Church of the New Creation as a dialectical action to fuel and contrast with the speaking of fire. The danger of peace is the complicity of being devoid of fire—that is, the current state of the church as a whole—yet peace is necessary for the practice of radical Christianity, to reflect upon the stillness, solitude and solipsism of radical faith in public. Silence, when deafening, is a powerful noise. The peace practiced by radical Christians, then, is not an absence of fire but is often the piercing of the Babel of nothingness in the world. Peace *passes over* and awaits the apocalyptic community while assembled for the festive board of the Paschal Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Radical Christian peace is an apocalyptic peace practiced in the present as a conduit for radical Christian community. Peace is the kindling of hope, as peace is granted by the enfleshed to the enfleshed through liturgical action that eroticizes the banal; peace is a restoration and healing practice that fills our tongues with fire once again, again and again. Peace may be experienced in solitude, but is resurrected in and through community (that is, through extraordinary ecclesia). Peace may be conceived, as Tillich did, as a possibility for a final, post-Pentecostal epoch, but radical Christian peace is not exclusive to the future, and is not a state but a practice that generates hope. As mystery praxis (Nevin, 1849), peace is Pentecost Craft. Pentecosting is not an everlasting task but one that culminates into the parousia, marching on to something again New, as in Habakkuk 3, where finally, after the Christ again appears, his grace "be with all the saints" (Rev. 22:21).

#### Notes

- 1 I employ DG Leahy's terminology here, which is discussed by Altizer in *The Apocalyptic Trinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 163ff).
- 2 Altizer is the author of many books, which I assume my reader has encountered or knows by reputation. Perhaps the most succinct summaries of Altizer's theology are The Descent into Hell (Philadelphia: Lippinott, 1970) and Living the Death of God (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006).
- 3 For more on the coincidentia oppositorum, see Altizer's Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963, 17ff).
- 4 Altizer, in an interview in the early 1970s documentary "Local Issue: God is Dead" (WGTV/University of Georgia), available online at http://video.google.com/videoplay? docid = -3696525433308712680&ei = XpihSsuiHKOmrAKGjYjvBA&q = death+of +god+video&hl = en&client = ms-rim#.
- 5 I wish here to draw attention to two pieces of artwork that depict this image of the ascension: British artist Simon Bisley's illustration of the ascension provocatively offers an image of the Post-Christ as lifeless, or nearly lifeless while being carried away by an angel, but curiously, an anonymous person, whose identity is hidden from view, leads the way with a torch of light. Indonesian artist Bagong Kussudiardja's painting of the ascension features an anonymous figure—is it Jesus or humanity?—eroticized by the bird of the Spirit. These pieces may be located in Simon Bisley (Bisley, 2004) and Bagong Kussudiardja (Kussudiardja, 1995).
- 6 It should also be mentioned, following the earlier discussion of forward-and-downward movement, that the symbol of the bird here is connected to the resurrected "Post-Christ" as the Pauline "first fruit", namely, that birds played a role in adorning the sacrifice of the ancient Hebrew "first fruits", as presented to the Temple. This ritual is described in Deuteronomy 26, but the role of birds is depicted in the Talmud, Bikkurim 3.

#### References

Altizer T (1970) The Descent into Hell. Lippincott: Philadelphia, pp 106–107, 109–111.

Altizer T (2003) The New Gospel of Christian Atheism. Davies: Aurora, CO, p 152. Bisley S (2004) Illustrations from The Bible. Heavy Metal: New York.

Daly M (1978) Gyn/Ecology. Beacon: Boston, MA, p 88.

Depoortere F (2008) The Death of God. T&T Clark: London, pp 160-162.

Irenaeus (c. 180) Against Heresies, Book 1:30.14.

Kussudiardja B (1995) The ascension. In: Blain S (ed). Imaging the Word; Vol. 2 United Church: Cleveland, OH, p 202. Leahy DG (1996) Foundation. SUNY Press: Albany, NY, p 543.

Nevin JW (1849) Sartorius on the person and work of Christ. *Mercersburg Review*; 1 (2): 154–155.

Rollins P (2011) Insurrection. Howard: New York, pp 13-14.

Swanson R (2007) Provoking the Gospel of Luke. Pilgrim: Cleveland, OH, pp 145–146.

Tillich P (1990) In: Stone R (ed). *Theology of Peace*. Westminster/John Knox: Louisville, KY, p 189.

Žižek S (2000) The Ticklish Subject. Verso: London, p 147.

Žižek S and Milbank J (2009) In: Davis C (ed) *The Monstrosity of Christ*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, p 260ff.

#### **Data Availability**

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

#### **Additional Information**

Competing interests: The author declares no competing financial interests.

**Reprints and permission** information is available at http://www.palgrave-journals.com/pal/authors/rights\_and\_permissions.html

**How to cite this article**: Rodkey C (2015) The passing of the peace: the ascension and the death of God. *Palgrave Communications*. 1:15043 doi: 10.1057/palcomms.2015.43.

© **()** 

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 International License. The images or other third party material in this ided in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise

article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in the credit line; if the material is not included under the Creative Commons license, users will need to obtain permission from the license holder to reproduce the material. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/

## Federici on Embry and Hughes and eds., 'The Eric Voegelin Reader: Politics, History, Consciousness'

Review published on Friday, August 10, 2018

**Charles R. Embry, Glenn Hughes, eds.** *The Eric Voegelin Reader: Politics, History, Consciousness.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017. 464 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-2134-6.

**Reviewed by** Michael P. Federici (Middle Tennessee State University) **Published on** H-Ideas (August, 2018) **Commissioned by** Eliah Bures

**Printable Version:** <a href="http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=51135">http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=51135</a>

Eric Voegelin is one of the most insightful and prolific philosophers of the twentieth century. His life (1901-85) spanned two world wars, the rise of totalitarianism, and the spread of modern ideologies that undermined the philosophical foundations of the Western political tradition. These experiences of political, social, and economic turmoil were the inspiration for his political theory. Taken as a whole, they constitute what has been called the crisis of the West, a period of unprecedented violence, war, revolution, and social upheaval that brought into question the very identity and health of Western civilization. Voegelin's work is in one sense an attempt to answer the question: why was the twentieth century so disordered?

As Voegelin explored the complexities of modernity and its particular problems of political order, he became convinced that insight and understanding require historical and philosophical depth. He studied a variety of civilizations, philosophers, and texts in search of patterns and evidence that would provide theoretical clarity to the meaning of human nature and historical existence. The philosophical scope of his work is astounding as well as daunting to students who wish to explore the political philosophy of such a seminal and influential thinker.

Throughout the course of his teaching career, Voegelin primarily taught undergraduate courses and, thus, did not attain a following of graduate students who became intellectual disciples. His influence was primarily due to his scholarship and is evident in the works of a substantial number of scholars, including Ellis Sandoz, Barry Cooper, Glenn Hughes, David Walsh, Jürgen Gebhardt, Paul Caringella, and Thomas A. Hollweck, among others. His writings influenced the works of Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Russell Kirk, and Gerhardt Niemeyer, as well as public intellectuals like William F. Buckley. The Voegelin Society, housed at Louisiana State University where Voegelin taught for sixteen years, typically sponsors more than a dozen panels annually at the American Political Science Association meetings and has done so for decades; they are among the best-attended panels at the annual meeting. The Voegelin Society was an outgrowth of the Voegelin Institute, created in 1987. In 2008 the Center for Voegelin Studies was created at the University of Gent, and Geoffrey Price founded the Center for Voegelin Studies at the University of Manchester, which he directed for several years.

Voegelin's collected works have been published in thirty-four volumes. Knowing where to begin reading is a difficult choice. The quantity, philosophical density, and new theoretical directions of his

#### H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online

H-Ideas

scholarship, which spans decades, make the initial experience of reading his work difficult to navigate. If one chooses his final book, *In Search of Order* (1987), as a starting point, it is impossible to understand the decades of work that led him to focus on a theory of consciousness. Starting at the beginning presents its own challenges. Voegelin's early works are not necessarily representative of his political theory. They focus on theoretical and historical problems related to the rise of totalitarianism and positivism and his discovery of the Anglo-American commonsense tradition. His best-known work, *The New Science of Politics* (1952), comes in the middle of his professional career and marks a new direction, if not a break from his earlier writings. This middle period focuses on the development of a philosophy of history and comes after Voegelin abandoned his *History of Political Ideas* project, a seven-volume work published posthumously (1997-1999).

Fortunately for readers interested in studying Voegelin's work, Charles R. Embry and Glenn Hughes have published *The Eric Voegelin Reader* with the intent of providing a starting point for the study of Voegelin's challenging essays and books. The introduction concisely explains the various parts of Voegelin's work, its changes in direction, and its contribution to the philosophy of human nature, the philosophy of history, and the philosophy of consciousness. A brief biographical overview, including his escape from the Nazis and intellectual response to totalitarianism, is provided. The introduction also suggests and describes six principles or themes in Voegelin's work: resistance to positivism; recovery of historical wisdom (especially from the ancient Greek experience); deliberate human participation in the open search for meaning that has as its end knowledge of the transcendent ground of being; differentiation or stratification of consciousness into transcendent and immanent dimensions; modernity as corrupted by gnostic ideologies that distort reality by engaging in reductionist thought; and philosophy as the open and endless search for truth that rejects the closed systems of ideology. The combination of these parts of the introduction provides context for studying and understanding Voegelin's political philosophy.

Voegelin scholars may quibble about the editors' selections from his writings, but it is difficult to argue with the organization of the chosen texts into five sections. Each selection includes a brief introduction that puts the text into context. The selections begin with chapters from Voegelin's *Autobiographical Reflections* (1989) and the preface from his early (1939) book *The Political Religions*. The second section includes selections from *The New Science of Politics*, the book that widened his influence and set the stage for his study of order and history. It also includes essays that are representative of his critique of modernity. Part 3 includes three of Voegelin's most important essays that explain the primacy of historical experience and its relationship to language symbols. Part 4 focuses on consciousness and divine reality, and is followed by the final section on philosophy of history. The book includes useful lists of further Voegelin readings and secondary readings about Voegelin and his works as well as a substantial index.

Undertaking the task of studying Voegelin is not for the faint of heart. It requires a commitment to read what is often dense philosophy with a language that is likely to be unfamiliar to the novice. At some point in the journey, the language and ideas begin to click and the powerful insight of Voegelin's philosophy is revealed. These insights are aptly identified by Embry and Hughes in their introduction and in the selected Voegelin texts. They include resistance to positivism and other reductionist ideologies, recovery of experiences of order, a theory of consciousness that can aid the recovery of experience, the differentiation of consciousness, analysis of modernity as gnostic, and the meaning of philosophy. What unifies the various parts of Voegelin's work is the philosophy of human

#### H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online

**H-Ideas** 

nature, an enduring search for the meaning of human existence.

Voegelin was especially interested in the rise of gnostic ideologies, what he sometimes referred to as political religions, that were closed to the open philosophical search for truth. Gnosticism is inspired by several factors, including a deep dissatisfaction with the world as it is. The injustice of the world is seen as the consequence of poor organization that can be remedied by using gnosis, secret knowledge, that can solve the problems of social, economic, and political life. Once empowered, gnostics reorganize society and the world in revolutionary ways that promise permanent relief from evil, thus Voegelin's often repeated phrase of immanentizing the eschaton. Nazism, communism, and positivism are examples of gnostic ideologies that are pernicious because they distort reality and truth by substituting dogmatic propositions for historical experience, and in doing so truncate human understanding of reality. Recovering experience is a matter of getting beyond symbols or ideas to the engendering experience that gave the symbols life. Philosophers attempt to recall experiences of order to consciousness so that they become a living force in contemporary life and can counter the ideological distortions of gnosticism. Plato's description of the struggle of philosophers to counter the doxa of the sophists inspired Voegelin's view of gnosticism and philosophy.

Embry and Hughes emphasize that Voegelin's philosophy does not claim to have created a system or discovered a complete understanding of reality. Rather, it comes to the more modest conclusion that philosophical search is ongoing and that while truth exists, human understanding of it is incomplete. Aspects of reality remain a mystery and, thus, philosophers must maintain a degree of humility in the search for truth. Voegelin did, however, employ the word "differentiated" to suggest that human understanding can be deepened as human experience is enriched through the ages. He did not believe that the human mind can reach a final or complete knowledge of reality, and thus his opposition to ideologies that claim comprehensive truth. The enduring search for truth itself is part of what defines human nature and philosophy.

Among the philosophically penetrating passages included in the book is the opening sentence of *The* New Science of Politics: "The existence of man in political society is historical existence; and a theory of politics, if it penetrates to principles, must at the same time be a theory of history" (p. 36). This sentence identifies Voegelin as someone who opposes the ahistorical character of much of modern philosophy, including social contract theory and its foundation, an ahistorical state of nature. Voegelin also emphasized the need to search for the truth of reality in all of its experiential dimensions, including transcendence. As political science and the academy were becoming more secular, positivistic, and ideological, Voegelin was intent on pushing against these trends by echoing the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions' discovery that "the Ground of existence is an experienced reality of a transcendent nature toward which one lives in a tension" (p. 119). The psyche is the sensorium of transcendence, the part of human consciousness that experiences the tension. Humans are, however, divided by the conflicting inclinations of virtue and vice, episteme and doxa, justice and injustice, to name a few. To experience existential tension is to be pulled in contrary directions, toward transcendence and away from it. Community is possible in so far as the experiences of transcendence become a living force in society. It was Voegelin's contention that the West was losing its memory of the experiences of transcendence and replacing it with "second reality," ideologically derived partial truths (Nazism, Communism, positivism) that distort the understanding of the meaning of human existence. Voegelin's work attempts to restore consciousness of these experiences that form and animate civilization. Thus, Voegelin stated in the preface to Israel and

#### H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online

H-Ideas

Revelation (1956), "Amnesia with regard to past achievement is one of the most important social phenomena" (p. 290). Part of the Western crisis was caused by a failure to employ what Edmund Burke called "the wisdom of the ages" in the drama of order and history. That wisdom and its experiential foundations were preserved in the culture, in other words, the myths, symbols, religions, literature, and art of particular societies and civilizations.

These basic tenets of Voegelin's political theory should be kept in mind as one works through the various aspects of his writings. He witnessed in a dramatic way, as the Nazis drove him from his home, and communism followed in its wake, the crisis of order in Western civilization. Restoration was first and foremost an exercise in scholarly study of the causes of order and disorder in particular historical societies and in the circumstances of the twentieth century. Voegelin spent a lifetime searching for the experiences of order that could be used to rebuild civilization. It was these historical experiences and not merely their derivative ideas that provided the necessary insights into the meaning of human nature. Art, poetry, and philosophy, for example, when at their best, are capable of conveying insights about human nature. They share a state of consciousness where humans experience order and the tension of life that includes a transcendent pull toward the highest part of human nature. Consequently, Voegelin insisted on an openness toward the ground of existence.

Modern ideologies provide a contrast to philosophical openness. Ideologies close the search for truth by truncating reality. Class and race, for example, are used by communism and Nazism, respectively, to eliminate the need to search for a deeper understanding of human nature. Their simplified version of reality (second reality) not only are substitutes for philosophy rightly understood but also empower those who propagate the ideology to silence those who engage in open philosophical search. The trial and death of Socrates is an example from classical experience of sophistry destroying philosophy. Voegelin's analysis of the problem of ideology is aptly covered in the three essays included in chapter 3: "In Search of the Ground," "On Debate and Existence," and "Immortality: Experience and Symbol."

The Eric Voegelin Reader is a valuable addition to the literature on a leading political philosopher. It provides a glimpse into the thirty-four volumes of Voegelin's works that will inspire readers to explore more of his writings as a way to understand defining aspects of the modern world. With Voegelin, there is always more. His books and articles are never about just one topic. They link various academic disciplines and range across cultures, civilizations, and historical time. Embry and Hughes make a compelling case for why reading Voegelin's work is an investment that is well worth the time and effort. Once Voegelin's ideas are applied to politics, history, and the study of human nature, one may not always agree with his conclusions, but it is difficult not to appreciate his accomplishment and the wisdom of his insights.

**Citation:** Michael P. Federici. Review of Embry, Charles R.; Hughes, Glenn; eds., *The Eric Voegelin Reader: Politics, History, Consciousness*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. August, 2018. **URL:** http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=51135

This work is licensed under a <u>Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0</u> United States License.

We have avoided the concept of faith in our description of the courage to be which is based on mystical union with the ground of being as well as in our description of the courage to be which is based on the personal encounter with God. This is partly because the concept of faith has lost its genuine meaning and has received the connotation of "belief in something unbelievable." But this is not the only reason for the use of terms other than faith. The decisive reason is that I do not think either mystical union or personal encounter fulfills the idea of faith. Certainly there is faith in the elevation of the soul above the finite to the infinite, leading to its union with the ground of being. But more than this is included in the concept of faith. And there is faith in the personal encounter with the personal God. But more than this is included in the concept of faith. Faith is the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself. The courage to be is an expression of faith and what "faith" means must be understood through the courage to be.

**∽** Paul Tillich. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. 1980. Pages 171–172.



## Illinois Wesleyan University Digital Commons @ IWU

Honors Projects Philosophy

1962

### Can We Communicate Ultimate Reality?

David M. Newcomer

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/phil honproj

Part of the Communication Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

#### **Recommended Citation**

Newcomer, David M., "Can We Communicate Ultimate Reality?" (1962). *Honors Projects*.

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/phil honproj/17

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Can We Communicate Ultimate Reality ?

bу

100

David M. Newcomer

ARCHIVES

111 N541c

Honors Paper Illinois Wesleyan University June 1, 1962 I would like to express my indebtedness to the faculty of Illinois Wesleyan University for presenting to me the opportunity to write an honors paper.

The initial interest in the field of religious language stems from lectures on "The Meaning of Religious Language" which were presented by Professor Paul Hessert. These lectures were given in the Philosophy of Religion course offerred in the spring of 1961.

I would also like to thank Professor John
VanderWaal, chairman of the Philosophy Department
at Wesleyan, for his personal guidance and encouragement
during the preparation of this paper. Under his
direction the Buck Memorial Library is rapidly
attempting to compensate for its great deficiency
in source material pertaining to this subject.

Appreciation is also due to those certain professors in various fields, who by their earnest concern for knowledge and fine scholarship as exhibited in their classroom, inspire many students to plunge into an undertaking which from the inception is beyond their grasp. The graditude for these individuals cludes an adequate expression.

#### OUTLINE

- I. Preface
- II. Introduction
  - A. Man's concern for a directed existence
  - B. Man is a social being, as a linguistic being
  - C. Are our linguistics rooted in and do they communicate the intended reality?
  - D. Proclamation of contemporary Zarathustra
  - E. Three religious claims
- II. Ontology

  - A. Traditional function of philosophy B. Knowing participates in being-ontic relation
  - C. Greek philosophy- search for
  - D. Common nature to existence
  - E.Relation of metaphysics to science
  - F. Anti-metaphysical theologians
  - G. Distinction between philosophy and theology
- III. Contemporary Revolution in Philosophy
  - A. Linguistic therapy
  - B.Essential terms of semantics
  - C. Sources of influence and main schools
  - D. Preoccupation with meaning
  - E. Logical positivists semantical approach to semantics
  - F. Evaluation and appraisal
- IV. A Functional Analysis of Religious Language
  - A. The nature of faith
  - B. Taking on of significance
  - C. The introduction of mystery
  - D. Various functions:
    - 1. Existential
    - 2.Ethical
    - 3.Belief
    - 4. "Quasi" factual
    - 5.Attitudinal
    - 6. "Directing attention"
    - 7.Convictional
    - 8. Impropriety
    - 9.Illumination through images

- E. Langer's presentational semantics
- F. Man as a symbolic animal
- G. Different levels of reality, therefore different levels of language

#### V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus- the Christian model of ontology and communication
  - 1. His most effective means of communicating ultimate reality was by what he was and by what he did
- B. The different levels of language and the other means of communication must simultaneously be developed to their utmost
- VI. Footnotes
- VII. Bibliography

From the moment of conception, the organism designated by the Greek term "ar opwros" is involved in a process of growing into a complex and highly developed structure. The instant the egg and sperm unite, a zygote is formed and an individual is engaged in being or existence. Every being of necessity must respond to his existence. Man's response comprizes his life, and his life is what he experiences. Every man 'ought' to live in an awareness of his state of affairs - the human condition of an existing being. Indeed, from the inception of this paper, presuppositions are presented, but this should not appear unreasonable. The explicit assumption is that man's life or response to his existence concerns man's attempt to be an existentially authentic being. Man as a being engaged in existence is preoccupied with the meaning of existence, his existence.

Then man's ultimate response is to orientate himself to the cosmos. It is not adequate, according to Mircea Eliade, for man to simply say that he is in the world or "just here". That response is made only by an organism which vegetates, not an authentic being. Once again, the explicit and implicit assumption of this paper is that man, in full awareness of his state of being, necessarily seeks to orientate himself to the cosmos; this existential concern is for a directed existence, an authentic being.

As this distinct being evolves, he continually attempts to orientate himself in his existence in a meaningful manner. When anything becomes meaningful, man inevitably tries to communicate that which he understands as being the answer to authentic existence.

Simultaneously with the development of man's social relations, linguistic communication plays an increasingly important role. Language, as a means of communication, not only assists in the clarification of our own thoughts but serves as a means of communicating our ideas to others. We can therefore see that language is an integral part of social existence. Language is a priceless possession that must be employed with a conscious effort to use it properly. If our efforts to use language precisely deteriorate, our ability to communicate with meaning and clarity will greatly diminish. An essential "dialogue" will thereby be lost to the ages, and a significant part of our meaningful existence will also be sacrificed.

These thoughts introduce us immediately to the concern of this paper. We need to ask ourselves if our concepts catch hold of and convey the meanings we intend to communicate, i.e. are our linguistic apparatus rooted in the reality we seek to know, and do they communicate that reality

Ludwig Wittgenstein implies a similar, yet more emphatic consideration when he states, "In propositions there must be exactly as much distinguished (Gleich soviel zu unterscheiden) as in the state of affairs that it represents." (2) Language cannot be discussed without involving the facts to which they refer. Semantics and ontology are the main areas to be investigated. Another preliminary consideration is that the very nature of that which is known is indicated by the approach to and solution of these problems. This contemporary concern cannot and must not be glossed over lightly by anyone who would be and think as a philosopher or theologian in the realms of scholarship.

Due to the influence and questions being raised by the proponents of philosophical movements associated with linguistic analysis, the validity of theological statements is being questioned. Someone will attempt to answer these questions, and it would be preferable if there would be a feasible response from within the discipline being attacked. In a previous paper, I have tried to explain why language is the battleground of Twentieth Century philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to inquire into the cognitive implications of theological language, and within this undertaking

to recognize any change in the traditional function of philosophy.

It was a little over a half-century ago that
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) spoke his prophetic
words through the character of Zarathustra. Zarathustra
came down from the mountain "satiated with wisdom" and
"descended into the lower world" in order that he might
save mankind. Zarathustra's proclamation that God is
dead is mild compared to the prophetic voices of the
"doing" philosophers of today. Briefly, their
Zarathustra would state that theological language is
dead, traditional philosophy is dead, and philosophy
is functional only as a linguistic theraphy. If the
philosopher can clarify the different usages of
language, man will be better able to understand what
claims are being made by a certain language.

The claims made through religious language are the items that confront every individual and require a response from him. In general, all religious claims to fact incorporate and proclaim an understanding in a larger dimension than the standard spacio-temporal reference. The religious claim is that there is in every manua soul that is answerable to God. This realm irresistably confronts every authentically existing being. In addition to this most basic

consideration, there are the implicit claims to knowledge. All religious language involves an existential knowledge about life or an individual's being. Secondly, religious language entails a cognition of the cosmos as an integrated whole. Lastly, religious language claims a knowledge of the way life can be orientated to and integrated with the cosmos. An example of the first implication is St. Augustine's brief statement, "Our heart cannot find rest until it has found Thee." (The full ramifications of the existential knowledge confessed in this statement can only be realized and understood by a more thorough acquaintance with the main tenets of Christianity.) A Taoists principle illustrates the second claim to knowledge. Tao, the cosmic energy, created the cosmos. Thereby, Tao creates "the way to go" and the physical universe is formed in a proper and distinct way or channel. third claim is clearly expressed by Buddha's teaching of the Law of Karma. If an individual will follow the "Middle Path", he may advance to a higher existence in his next birth. Karma, the inevitable judgement of sins which determines your next existence, is a principle of justice that deals with man's relationship to the cosmos. In conclusion, religious statements proclaim the knowledge of a reality above

this material realm. This higher reality has pervading results in the existence of every human being. The fulfillment of life or the meaning of one's life comes with the establishment of this relationship of life with the cosmos. (3)

These religious claims point to and attempt to express the being of a higher reality, a reality that is absolute and ultimate. This religious concern for the ultimate involves one's total response. Karl Barth expresses the belief that this subjective search is an encounter with the objective, ultimate reality. For Barth, this is the historical Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ. Therefore, theological language is not simply subjective, whimsical postulations, but refers to a concrete reality to which an existential being passionately responds.

At this point our discussion is progressing toward statements dealing with reality or being. For the theologian this confrontation with the problem of reality entails ontological implications. Turning our attention in an ontological direction introduces us to a perennial problem of philosophy. Traditionally the problem of reality has been handled by philosophy under the title of metaphysics. Metaphysics has been broken into three categories: ontology, epistemology,

and axiology. The term "metaphysics" was coined by the Romans to describe the type of writings that followed Aristotle's book called <u>Physics</u>. Thus the preposition xerá ("after") was prefixed to Physics to designate any similar writings.

When Paul Tillich discusses this aspect of philosophy he believes that it is less misleading to speak of ontology than of metaphysics. Tillich suggests that we "call philosophy that cognitive approach to reality in which reality as such is the object. Reality as such, or reality as a whole, is not the whole of reality; it is the structure which makes reality a whole and therefore, a potential object of knowledge. Inquiring into the nature of reality as such means inquiring into those structures, categories, and concepts which are presupposed in the cognitive encounter with every realm of reality." (4)

It is apparent for Tillich that the character of the general structures that make experience possible involves the philosophical question. Reference is here made to Tillich because he most adequately explains that when the religious statements express a claim to knowledge, the statements are inextricably bound-up in the ontological question. Since knowing is an act that participates in being, i. e. an "ontic relation",

interpretation of being. Understanding this issue, we can readily see the friction between Tillich's ideas and those of contemporary liguistic analysists to abandon ontology. Tillich's answer is very clear. Any answer to the relation of signs or logical operations to reality involves a statement about the "structure of being." Therefore, all statements as to cognitive claims should express their fundamental ontological assumptions. In conclusion, we should not look on ontology as a subjective stab in the dark at "the world behind the world." Theological statements are directly concerned with an analysis of those structures of being which we experience in our everyday, every moment involvement with reality. (5)

In order to establish the idea of an absolute structure more firmly in our minds, we need only investigate the Milesian school's search for the puristant which is primary, fundamental, and persistent, what is natural or given. The three Ionian philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, respectively believed water, and things. These philosophers initiated a tradition search for the absolute, not the relative or secondary substances.

Again in <u>The Republic</u>, Socrates, in his maieutic fashion, wasn't simply for subjective opinions concerning the meaning of "justice". Polemarchos' conventional definition or Thracymarchos' radical sophist definition of "justice" were insufficient; they weren't founded in an absolute structure.

Granted that theology is necessarily confronted with the ontological question, we need to consciously ask whether Tillich explains it clearly by saying that which confronts us ultimately must be being if we are to be confronted by and concerned with this reality. He also proposes that this being must be our ground of being or the unconditional power of being. More emphatically he states that this "being itself" expresses itself in and through the structures of being. "(6) After having briefly stated Tillich's ontological viewpoint, we will gain additional understanding by a further explanation of ontological structures.

Everett W. Hall, in his article entitled

"Metaphysics", suggests that the present degradation
of metaphysics is a result of the prevailing emphasis
on action and doing something directly and immediately.
In reply, Hall states that metaphysics indirectly plays
a vital share in directing progress by "shaping views

as to what nature is and how it can and ought to be controlled, by indicating the proper ends."(7) The second criticism of metaphysics is illuminated by explaining that Dewey's attempt to make thought the instrument of activity is still based upon metaphysical assumptions. The enterprise of metaphysics is also attacked because of its high degree

Any assumption on the part of specialists to the effect that generality leads to unrealiability and thus to a futile inquiry as to its truth, is in itself based upon metaphysical foundations.

people respond according to assumptions based upon their experiences. Undergirding our intention to communicate our existential situations to others, there is the very basic assumption that there is an objective, common nature to all cases of knowledge and also to all existents. (8) We thus affirm by our existence that we believe in a "common nature to existence" in the entities which we suppose to exist and that it is objective to our action and response; and most important, it is objective to even our language. Such universal constants the scholastics referred to as "transcendentals." This reference did

not imply that such existents transcended all experience, but rather it was expressing the conviction that these existents were a constant factor in each and every experience. Mircea Eliade would add that this transcendental element is the sacred as contrasted with the profane. If we can once establish this point, we can then proceed to the problem of expressing the experience of existents in meaningful language or meaningful sentence structures. Hall believes that a meaningful statement referring to universal constants "excludes symbolic expressions in their referential aspect (though not as facts). "(9) Unfortunately he does not explain why only objective language as described by the logical positivists is acceptable. (Although we are still involved with the inception of this paper, this is the very point we shall be trying to clarify. Religious statements as symbolic statements are referring to an objective existent.)

Metaphysicians have traditionally made claims concerning the nature of knowledge and about what exists and what it is to exist. They are not primarily concerned with what part of things exist. At the same time the metaphysician can not and must not believe himself to be independent of scientific findings. In general metaphysicians must be able to modify their

stand, not their aims, and according to science, must utilize science, and generalize from scientific generalizations. It is the task of metaphysics to establish by induction from scientific propositions, propositions that do not occur explicitly in the sciences as a result of assumptions with built-in exclusiveness.

After having referred to the relationship between metaphysics and science, it is essential to clearly distinguish between the types of hypothesis with which they respectively deal. Scientific hypothesis can be varified because they state a relationship between variables. If the variables have been identified we may verify whether a predicted result actually takes place (Y=(f)X+K). Metaphysical hypotheses refer to constants; they refer to an existent condition of being. Therefore, particular positive instances are neither conclusive nor do they posit definite verification. Yet the instances serve as illustrations by clarifying through concrete examples and stimulating imaginative insight which makes us aware of contradictory illustrations. Particular instances aid in sizing up an entire perceptual field.

Since the methodology of metaphysics must be applied to unverifiable statements, there is often the

tendency to allow "anything to go". Actually metaphysicians should try to constantly develop their methodology so as to state what would constitute approximate disverifications. In the final analysis they must exercise critical inquiry and honest insight. Though these two attitudes are the best method possible, they remain highly unreliable. The metaphysician must sincerely attempt to survey experience from many various standpoints.

At times there have been strong reactions to metaphysics among theologians. The two main anti-metaphysical theologians should be viewed in the light of their Kantian influence. It was Kant's epistemological dualism that lead to a metaphysical agnosticism. It is also the interweaving of Kantian dualism and agnosticism that has infiltrated all German theology since Kant. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in his discussion of religion substituted the "feeling of absolute dependence" for theology. The "father of modern theology" would not allow the intellectual or ethical aspect of consciousness to be stressed as being more supreme than the religious consciousness. Following along in the footsteps of his precusor, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) continues the reaction against metaphysical theology by saying that we know God only on the basis of value-judgments.

Religious judgments were valuational rather than existential. God is not reached by speculation, nor by "evidences" in nature, nor by any mystical experiences, nor by a rational apriori or intimate feeling. They rejected metaphysics as the manner in which to stress objectivity. (10)

But again we are drawn back to the fact that there still remains that perennial religious ideas in which the faith is expressed. This is the very reason that Paul Tillich insists that theology and philosophy ultimately are drawn to the same ontological question. We can not side-step the issue - man is confronted with being. To this truth he must respond.

Philosophy is not the concern for mere matters of fact; rather it is the "best wisdom of the lover of wisdom, with reference to ultimate value and ultimate reality." (11) Such a philosophical-theological approach underlines the fact that man with his total being responds to what he considers unconditionally important and his ultimate concern. He responds to reality as a whole.

Tillich continues in his "Introduction" to distinguish between theology and philosophy.

"Philosophy deals with the structure of being in

itself; theology deals with the meaning of being for us."(12) While being driven by a passion for objective truth, the philosopher intends to pursue an investigation of being and its structures by means of a detached objectivity. In quite an opposite manner, the theologian involves himself with and commits himself to the existence which is his subject matter. the first point of divergence is the cognitive attitude. Secondly, there is divergence concerning the difference in their sources. "The philosopher looks at the whole of reality to discover within it the structure of reality as a whole. " He believes his cognative ability is such that he can understand the structures of being. He likewise assumes that the logos of reality as a whole and the logos working in him are identical. In other words, the logos permeates all or is common to all. particular or special place reveals the structure of being. The cosmos is pure reason. (13)

The theologian does not have as his source of knowledge universal logos. The specific <u>logos</u> that manifests itself in a particular historical event, that became flesh, is the theologian's source of knowledge. The logos is not manifest through common rationality but through the church. The difference in content is shown when the philosopher deals with the

categories of being in relation to the material which is structured by them and when the theologian relates the same categories and concepts to the quest for the "new being". He speaks of the self-estrangement of the subject, about the spiritual center of personal life, and about community as a possible embodiment of the "New Being". (14)

Having sufficiently examined the traditional function of ontology and having discussed the traditional ontological similarities and differences between the philosopher and theologian, it is important to view the previous considerations in the light of any beneficial contemporary trends. It is my conviction that contemporary philosophy might help us in focusing-in on the essence of this paper.

Our primary concern shall be the investigation of a general statement made by R. Gregor Smith in the General Introduction to the wonderful series of books published by The Library of Philosophy and Theology.

The statement is as follows:

"Many things have contributed so to change the picture of the work which theologians and philosophers have to do that it seems to be not so much a modified picture as an entirely new one. The strong blasts of positive and empirical dogmatic theology blowing down

from Switzerland upon Europe and America, the immense changes which have overtaken philosophy, especially in Britain, so that the very ways of thinking seem to have altered, and the changes which have taken place in the world in which we all live - have continued to bring about this revolution. We live in a post-liberal, post-idealist, atomic age in theology. Philosophy and theology alike are being compelled to face their traditional problems in such a radical way that the question even arises: are our traditional problems the real ones?" (15)

Willem F. Zuurdeeg has been as responsive to these new influences and has tried to incorporate the advantages of new movements and corresponding revolutions in his book, An Analytical Philosophy of Religion. It is Zuurdeeg's firm conviction that a break with the traditional idealistic approach to the function of philosophy is essential with the new insights brought about by the Analytic Age. According to him, the function of philosophy is to analyze languages. function appears most realistic because "it follows a method which complies with what we can observe about people."(16) In our culture we are most aware that men speak many languages (e.g. mathematics, empirical science, morals, poetry, and various religious languages.) Therefore we must not look upon philosophy

as a rational attempt to discover the true meaning of life, the real value of things or the intrinsic nature of the universe.

This movement has been called by various terms -Logical Positivism, Logical Empiricism, Logical Analysis, and Analytical Philosophy. While each term stands for a peculiar emphasis, this movement rebels against the accusation that it is a school. They consider themselves "doing philosophy." The entire group of men can be most easily referred to under the heading, analytical philosophy. William Hordern of Garrett Theological School in a recent lecture stressed the idea that very few pursuits have come to such quick maturity. Taking a que from August Comte's proposal that positivism is a higher evolutionary plateau that goes beyond mythology and philosophy, the philosophical analysists have emphasized the inability to make judgments, the abandonment of metaphysics (which results from language confusion), and necessity of not making value-judgements. In essence, the task of the philosopher is to make himself unnecessary. This does not involve a theory but activity. Philosophy is therapy of language. This is the honest conclusion to the question, "What is the purpose of philosophy?" The throne of philosophy has splintered into many chairs

of science. These chairs of science have splintered into many specialized footstools. This historical revolution has caused contemporary philosophy (maybe a passing fad) to propose the preceding function. (17)

Today the word "semantics" is being referred to by many people in many different fields. In most academic circles investigation of semantics has become a prececupation. The field of philosophy (specifically the logical positivist movement) has been its main entertainers. This trend is clearly reflected in such remarks as, "Our entire philosophy is a correction of our use of language." (18) In a similar tone Bertrand Russell has said that the function of philosophy is not to edify mankind, but to clarify meanings.

"The importance to the philosopher of the study of semantics may be realized when it is pointed out that there could be no philosophy without words, and that philosophy consists of the meanings of words." (19) William Hoerber continues with a word of warning. We must proceed with discriminative caution as we approach various linguistic developments. Even though these people are preoccupied with meaningfulness, they too are sometimes vague in their terminology. We will encounter different uses of the words 'semantics',

'language', and 'meaning'. If we are to really understand and think with these men, we must know what each is referring to when he speaks of "verification" et cetera. We must look for the assumptions and inevitable outcome of their proposals. "The apprehending and study of semantical distinctions, relations and principles is preparation of the ground upon which a scientific foundation of philosophy may be built more easily, and more securely. It is a primary part of a scientific method in philosophy." (20)

"He is a boy;" and "It is raining outside;" and
"My disposition for doing what was right prevented me
from robbing the bank", are all basic statements
representing quite different types of grammatical
structures. The first one is meaningful and is
necessarily true by the established definition of its
words. The second statement may be meaningful.

Its meaningfulness depends upon verification, which we
find to be possible. The third statement leads us into
some difficulty. How are we to verify this feeling?

If we cannot verify it, should we continue discussing
it? It is evident that we have come up against a
a typical semantical problem. Can we retain this
meaningless statement and use our language justly?
This is the context of our topic. Those philosophers who

deal exclusively with linguistic problems 'feel' that a more detailed analysis of our linguistic systems will lead to answers having factual validity and being able to be verified. Thereby, it is the greatest hope that the emotional pitfalls of the ordinary uncritical use of linguistics may be overcome. We cannot stand by and allow language to lose its cognitive claims.

Rudolf Carnap wrote a fine introduction to semantics. His purpose in writing the book is, in addition to a purely formal analysis of language, that we are in dire need of "an analysis of the signifying function of language, in other words, a theory of meaning and interpretation."(21) Another very important consideration which Carnap is willing to express, and most others will not spell out in their writings, is that this development of semantics will ultimately construct a theory of truth and a theory of logical deduction. We must always keep in mind these purposes and their far-reaching implications.

Semiotic is the theory of signs and language.

This theory is divided into three areas, these areas stress different types of relationships. Pragmatics (or interpretics) is the term referring to the relationship between words and user. Syntax is the relationship between words and other words. Semantics is the relation-

-ship between the words and objects they designate.

Semantics is our main field of interest in this section.

R. Carnap also subdivides the Semantical division of Semiotics. Descriptive semantics is a title given to "the description and analysis of the semantical features, either of some particular historically given language,.. or of all historically given languages in general." (22) Then descriptive semantics is primarily the description of facts or is in general an empirical science. A semantical system is the result of building a set of semantical rules. "The construction and analysis of semantical systems is called pure semantics." (23) Thus, in contradistinction to the former, pure semantics is analytical and does not pertain to factual content.

In Chapter B, Carnap introduces us to a few more essential terms. In the above discussion we recognized that a semantical system involves a designated set of rules. It is evident that by designating a certain set of rules by which our language must abide, we inaugurate a semantical system that establishes a truth-condition for every sentence employing descriptive semantics. Carnap says that the rules are a sufficient and necessary condition for the truth of an object. In other words, a system of language is made understandable by the rules, because to understand the assertion

by the sentence is to know under what conditions it would be true. This is the necessary ground work in understanding some of the main statements referred to by other books on the subject. Thus Carnap has adequately expressed that rules determine the meaning or sense of a sentence.

Another significant point made by Carnap is that truth and falsity are designated by this term. The truth-condition previously discussed is a preliminary step toward the truth-value of a sentence.

Carnap sums up his brief introduction by stating, "a semantical system may be constructed in this way: first a classification of the signs is given, then the rules of formation are laid down, then rules of designation, and finally rules of truth." The logical outcome is a prescription for truth and such a prescription culminates in a "Correspondence" theory of truth. Thus we should realize that a great deal is at stake.

A few words in the way of summation are probably necessary at this point. Bertrand Russell, when discussing Ludwig Wittgenstein says that he views the development of semantical systems much as we would a chess game. If we are to play the game, there are certain rules which we must observe and

only certain moves that we are able to make.

"Wittengenstein (Tractatus 4.034, 4.46) has

emphasized the point of view that the truth-conditions

of a sentence constitute its meaning, and that under
standing consists in knowing these conditions."(25)

It would be almost impossible and a great shortcoming of this paper, not to sight some of the sources, schools, and men who have made outstanding contributions to linguistic movement. Logical positivism has been the leading proponent of many linguistic doctrines. general, this movement is opposed to the religious philosophy of Protestant New-Orthodoxy. "Its aim is to get away from metaphysical value judgments and to purify knowledge from all axiological and religious elements."(26) The sources of logical positivism are rooted deeply in philosophy and science. A study of British empiricism of the Eighteenth Century is a fine introduction to their beliefs. Following the positivistic influence of Comte they state that the sum total of knowledge is provided by science. They inherited the empiricist idea (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) that only assertions about empirical facts admit of verification. Jumping ahead in our discussion, but relevant to this point, is Hume's belief that the impossibility of metaphysics is due to the inability

of verifying its problems.

The Vienna Circle founded by Moritz Schlick is probably the cutstanding group in the historical of philosophy's preoccupation with linguistics. Mach preceded Schlick and made one outstanding contribution to the school. His procedure used in defining terms employed in mechanics was that meaning is in the method. When the domineering and ruthless Nazi regime came into being, the Vienna group broke up. Schlick, its founder, was stabbed by one of his students. Carnap went to the University of Chicago and continued teaching and writing. Waissmann went to teach at Oxford. Neurath, who sied in England in 1945, was to become the first editor of the Monographs which were published just before the outbreak of the war and which later became the basis of the International Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences. Later we see the entrance of the mathematicians, Whitehead and Russell, and the pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey. This transplantation of logical empiricism was greatly aided by Alfred Jules Ayer's book, Language, Truth and Logic, published in 1936. (Reference to this book will be made later.)

It is interesting to note that R. Carnap in his Introduction to Semantics states that the systematic development of semantics stems from the Warsaw school of logicians. This group's contributions have been in the fields of contemporary logic and logical foundations of mathematics. Kraft's book, The Vienna Circle, is the only other book that draws specific attention to this group. S. Lesniewski's lectures dealt with semantical concepts, e.g. concept of truth and the semantical antinomes. T. Kotarbinski made a detailed analysis of certain semantical and related pragmatical concepts. Alfred Tarski who was the main influence behind Carnap's book laid the foundation of a systematic construction on the basis of the preceding analysis. Because the works of the Polish school were not translated until after 1936, they have not been given the credit they deserve.

Another great influence upon the philosophy of analysis in England has been the Cambridge School.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is undoubtedly the paramount figure in this school and possibly the entire historical development of semantics. Due to the existence of the Nazi regime, Ludwig went to Cambridge where he was appointed professor in 1939 as a result of G. E. Moore's retirement. The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921) was the only book published during his life time. In 1958 his 'Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical

Investigations" ', The Blue and Brown Books was published. Ludwig dictated the "Blue Book" to his class at Cambridge during the 1933-34 term and had a few copies stenciled. The "Brown Book" was presented in the same manner during 1934-35 at which time he had only two students. That year he had only three copies made. These two one-year lecture notes were circulated bound in a blue wrapper and brown wrapper respectively, and thereby they acquired their names.

In the early portions of the "Blue Book"

Wittgenstein believes that the puzzles we try to solve arise from an attitude toward language. "The man who is philosophically puzzled sees a law in the way a word is used, and, trying to apply this law consistently comes up against . . . . paradoxical results."(27)

Before this discussion he does not see mataphysics connected with language, but rather an attempt to ask and answer questions in a scientific manner.

In his first publication (Tractatus) he developed the view that all truths of logic are tautologies.

Tautologies are simply analytical statements. Their contradictory is a self-contradiction. They are necessarily true. In the following years, his interest changed from logic to logical analysis.

Earlier we referred to Ludwig when speaking of

his concept of "language games" with their rules and restrictions. Later he rejected what had been said in his first book concerning statements being divided into ultimate constituents — logical atomism. One of his major statements was that the meaning of a word is acquired through and in its use. According to him, we must learn the 'grammar' or 'logic' of a word. "The raising of metaphysical problems would then be the result of a defective grasp of the grammar of words. For once the rules are properly understood, there survives no temptation to ask such questions. Linguistic therapy has cured us from the desire." (28)

With an understanding of the problems, the basic terms, main sources of influence, and prominent proponents, we are required to center our attention on the preoccupation with meaning. It is quite evident that all linguistic developments should be investigated with the recognition that it did not come about in a vacuum, and a conscious effort should be made to recognize the influences of the logical, mathematical, and scientific developments of the nineteenth and twentieth conturies.

In any semantical analysis it is necessary to presuppose the stipulated relation between the sign and the signified. Specific meaning is given to a sign when we precisely designate what the above relation is to be. If any stipulation is to be made, both the sign and the signified must be identifiable. If we use the word "tree" we must be able to indicate what the word is and indicate what the signified object (tree) is. This process is usually carried on by definition, but definitions don't proceed on ad infinitum. We, sooner or later, arrive at primitive concepts (undefinable words) where we simply point to the immediately present.

We thus see the necessity of verification if only by pointing. This brings us to the belief that the meaning of the sign is in its verification. For the statement "It is raining outside." to have any meaning we will in the process of analysis discover the means of verification. Alfred Jules Ayer, in his book Language, Truth, and Logic does not think a relevant experience is sufficient for verification and neither are observational statements. He carries the necessity of verification to the extreme of requiring an experimental statement. He is willing to say that statements according to some semantical systems are meaningful which are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. For him the only real meaning and meaningful statement in the sense of true or false is the literal meaning as

distinguished from the factual meaning or empirical hypothesis. Unless a statement meets this meaning of the 'verification of meaning', it would not be capable of being understood in a scientific hypothesis or common-sense statements.

Kraft, as he views the semantical developments of the Vienna school, doesn't believe their idea of verification necessitates <u>actual</u> verification. They are speaking more of a '<u>verification in principle</u>'. This possibility of verification can be either by logical

Meaningless statements are empty in regards to being scientifically verifiable, but are in no way non-sensical. Even though such statements are not non-sensical, he discusses them very little. Our only conclusion is that they are of little significance.

He points out that we must be careful if we say that only assertions about empirical facts admit of verification. In essence, only statements we prove through experience are meaningful because they alone, can be verified. Therefore, mathematical and logical statements are meaningless, even if they are statements concerning the logic of science.

In summarizing the verificational analysis, Fredrick Ferré says that we should set rules for

language if we are to use it as an instrument for a communication of fact. But he says, and we should remember, that we will get out of a language what we put into it. Within the dichotomy of analytic statements of truth-conditions (no experience necessary) and fact-asserting synthetic statements (which are not meaningful because they are extra linguistic and must be tested against some form of relevant truth e.g. sense experience), all logically important meaningfulness is included.

For a fuller understanding of the topic let us further investigate the meaning of a relevant truth. Our sense-experience verification is not conclusive. The corollary to this statement is that verification is greater or lesser probable but not necessary. It stands to reason that if we can through verification prove the positive denial of the negative we also have a meaningful statement. Thus verification can also be arrived at by falsifiability. (29)

If we attempt to verify anything beyond analytic or synthetic statements, we are once again in danger. At this level truth-conditions are not met and any statements are devoid of literal significance. If they are stated, they are parasitical because they fail to abide by the rules. These statements operate

on an "emotive capital" because they do not allow for translation into statements about possible experience.

Ferre presents an excellent summary in three basic statements. a) Philosophy is not empirically uninformative. Wittgenstein says, "Philosophy is not a natural science." The sphere for philosophy is "logical meaningfulness." He became convinced that philosophy should rid itself of a priori notions regarding an ideal language and of the relation of language to fact and concern itself only with language as such, within its actual use. b.) Linguistic significance is the primary subject matter of philosophy. Analysis is essential because grammatically perfect sentences may conceal logical unmeaning. c.) The function of philosophy is to engage in analysis of meaningful language.

According to Ayer, all philosophers that have been considered to be great have simply been misunderstood analysists. For example, Socrates was most interested in establishing the meaning (e.i. identifying specifically what we mean) of terms. In the <u>Republic</u>, Socrates wants man to ask himself what he really means by the word "justice." Do we really know the meaning of terms? If we don't stipulate a meaning of what value are they? There are no per se philosophical

problems. Philosophy is a method of making statements clear, it is involved with solving puzzles, not revealing truth. (30)

It is important that we recognize the ramifications of such proposals and the blow that is given to metaphysics. The movement of logical positivism seems to be one more of the many movements which developed within the realm of philosophy; and when this off-shoot became independent, it took away a portion of its mother. The question remains, "Will the mother which has given birth to many offspring be resolved through the independent division of her branches?"

Wittgenstein has said that metaphysics so long as they exist have a defective grasp of the 'grammar' of words. Ayer says that metaphysics cannot reveal to us knowledge of a transcendent reality. We can only verify that which the senses can experience and not the superexperience.

M. Schlick wrote an essay entitled "Turning Point in Philosophy". (Die Wendi Der Philosophie" opened the first number of Volume I of Erkenntniss (1930-31).) In his anti-metaphysical essay, principle assumptions are set forth. "The clue to their nature is to be found in the fact that every cognition is an expression or representation. That is, it expresses a fact which is

cognized in it." "So all knowledge is such only by virtue of its form. It is through its form that it represents the fact known." The signs not becoming the determiner of reality and any ideas concerning epistemology are thrown to the wind. "The form itself cannot be represented." (31) "Everything is knowable which can be expressed... There are consequently no questions which are in principle insoluble." Meaningless sequence of words are such because "they: "transgress the profound inner rules" of logical syntax discovered by new analysis." (32) (The inner quotes are my own. It seems this is purely emotional language.)

Schlick continues by saying there can be no metaphysics "not because we aren't capable of the task but
because there is no task. Then it will no longer be
necessary to speak of "philosophical problems" for one
will speak philosophically concerning all problems.."(33)

Ferre has a very interesting chapter dealing with the elimination of theological metaphysics. The almost impossible problem to be solved is for the theological language to maintain a factual content and at the same time have a supernatural reference. The radical division in language between the observable and unobservable is not permissable.

To say that God is necessary is to say something logically impossible; a synthetical term such as God united with an analytical term is logically incompatable. It is similar to speaking of a round square or a beginning not preceded by something. This theological misuse of language is emotive. Since these statements are unfalsibiable, they are nonsense. (Recall that a previous man said that a meaningless statement is not non-sensical. And according to what Schlick said above, this idea is nonsense and thus doesn't exist.)

A revelant parable told originally by Professor

John Wisdom explains how two men came to a group of

flowers in the jungle. One man said there was a

gardener, and the other disagreed. After no gardener

showed up in a few days, and they had built an electric

fence around the area and no screams were heard, and no

blood hounds tracked anyone down, the original believer

said the gardener was invisible. The other friend

replied asking how the elusive gardener differs from

an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all. (34)

In passing it is worth noting that we should not give

which is essential. An example of his restatement is that instead of saying "God exists", we should say

"some people have had and all may have experiences called 'meeting God'".(35)

There are four main ideas that we may obtain from R. Carnap's essay "The Elimination of Metaphysics...." Any psychological association of some image or feeling with a word is not a sufficient or valid way of acquiring meaning. There is no critera for an application and nothing is asserted. Simply putting these emotional words in new context does not help in becoming meaningful. Secondly, Carnap believes the mythological use of 'God' is meaningful but the metaphysical use is meaningless because it transcends experience. The theological use of the word oscillates between the former two and its disadvantage is that it is judged by the empirical science. Thridly, under the topic the "Meaninglessness of All Metaphysics", he deals with the faults centering around the werb "to be." The first fault is the ambiguity between its use as a copula prefixed to a predicate and its use as designating existence. second fault lies in the meaning of its use as "existence". (36) Since Kant we have known that "existence" is not a property (God is). It can only be applied to a predicate (e.g. Descartes' "cogito ergo sum".) First, we cannot say that "I exist". An existential statement does not have the form " a

exists" but rather "there exists a." The second fault is the transition from "I think" to "I exist". Not "I am B! to "I am" but rather "I am B" to "B exists".

(G. E. Moore is supposed to have written an influential essay dealing with the faults of the verb "to be".)

Up to this time there have only been slight indications of personal disagreement or rather obvious inadequacies of certain ideas. At present we must appraise and evaluate some essential doctrines.

Almost all men that have been mentioned as proponets of "the method of verification provides the meaning" (the most general way of expressing the over-all trend) say that the function of philosophy is not the representation of facts. As Carnap says, metaphysical speculation merely expresses a volitional attitude toward life. He believes the context of metaphysical speculation is not theoretical and therefore does not describe the state of affairs.

Personally, this seems to be one of the major shortcomings. An attitude, which I believe metaphysics to be, may well be non-theoretical in the sense that this language does not refer to plain, unadulterated objective facts. BUT we cannot go a step further (which their assumption seems to do) and deny that these life-feelings don't indicate and point to a

"quasi-factual") as any other and aren't meaningful to our existence. A 'reality' as prescribed by their assumptions definitely short changes reality. They only deal with a segment of reality which they "feel" confident to handle. According to Ferre, any victory that narrows down what is fact is too cheap to be convincing. Susanne K. Langer would also agree that they have arbitrarily created their own "little grammar bound island."

When anyone sets up arbitrary rules by which we arrive at meaning, they are setting up a priori conditions for truth and exclude anything else. to be saying if you cannot play our rules then you cannot play. This is an escape from some real issues and a denial of what could possibly be reality. The movement starts out in an attempt to clarify language and discard unverifiable language games and winds up creating their own isolated game in a vacuum. Man determines the meaning of sign-combinations. Meaning becomes relative to a certain language composed of a semantical system. Wittgenstein himself recognized some of these things when he said "My statements are meaningless" and nothing is easier than to expose and question as a meaningless pseudo-problem. (37)

The verification principle is misunderstood if it is used as a criterion for judging the meaningfulness of all language. The principle itself should be asserting a fact, but when the principle is used to test itself we find it devoid of meaning because there is no sense experience for the task. For on their very premises the statements must be judged meaningless.

Ferre also shows its narrowness in dealing with theological language and paradoxes which may both be "philosophically useful or cognitively illuminating."

In essence it becomes a criterion of empiricality, not of meaningfulness. (38)

In summation, the using of the verification principle has possibly saved metaphysics and theological discourse from becoming non-cognitive through lack of a technical use of language. 'It is primarily valuable as an antidote, but poisonous as an exclusive diet.' As a principle it surely fails to appreciate the wide variety of linguistic uses. Carried to its logical extreme it distorts our use of language rather than clarifies. After thinking through this section we should realize that there is a necessity for metaphysics and an urgent need to be concerned with semantics. Language is the only means of communicating factual experiences. We cannot abandon language or

get away with misusing it. It is necessary for living a full life. We must make a conscious effort to do language justice. An investigation of meaningfulness must always be at the fore-front of philosophical investigations.

Thus far we have tried to explain the ontological question as presented by traditional philosophy and have sought an understanding of the contemporary fad in philosophy to analyze the language which attempts to communicate this reality. In the final section we will be primarily concerned with a functional analysis of religious language. This approach seems to be only natural after realizing the built-in shortcomings in the premises of the earlier analytical philosophers and the insight into our problem given through Wittgenstein's proposal that the only remaining approach is to concern ourselves with the actual use of language, not an ideal language and its relation to fact.

Probably the best transitional idea is that esponsed by Willem Zuurdeeg as he draws attention to the differentiating factors between mere propositional statements and statements made by a person. (39) To ask the meaning of propositions is only relevant to mathematics and science. To ask the meaning of what a person states is relevant to religious language. The latter idea reveals that

the language situation involves a human situation. As Zuurdeeg continues in his book, this emphasis exposes us to the man-who-speaks. Man speaks with convictions. In fact, man is his convictions. Emphasizing his idea with more vehemence, Zuurdeeg calls the language of mathematics and science "artificial" language. I take this to mean, it is artificial because it does not take man into consideration. We cannot perform a logical analysis of a person. Simultaneously and interwoven with the language situation is a human situation. A definite shortcoming of any analysis is the omission of this significant fact.

Often in the historical development of philosophy and theology we encounter attempts to explain the epistemological basis of faith. But it seems evident that such ideas concerning the dynamics of faith are only convincing for those who already have made theistic commitments. An example of this would be the voluntarist's belief that faith creates the fact.

According to voluntarist, man cannot wait for a proof concerning his faith. It is similar to an understanding that a girl's love depends upon the boy's love that is offered simultaneously. Another manner in which his idea may be expressed is that we cannot wait to plant a seed until we have proof that a plant will grow from

the seed. It appears as though the relationship between the seed and the flower is conscientiously known, even if this knowledge is the result of accidental findings, before a person ultimately commits himself to the act of planting. It is as if theism were already true. Likewise any attempt to base faith on the moral order of the universe (e.g. Butler's Conscience, Kant's Moral Law, or Ross' Duty) seems to be convincing only for those who already profess theistic inclinations. Again there seems to be no logical inference from the illative sense (i.e. "to divine the significance of a large field of evidence", or "appreciating the drift of miscellaneous mass of evidence") (40) to the knowledge that God exists. These attitudes seem to be the result and not the cause.

John Hick's development of the nature of faith provides certain insights for our present point of concern. His basic thesis deals with the manner of cognition by which the religious man gains an awareness of God. Another of his main endeavors is to see how religious cognition is related to other cognitions. In the inception he states that there is an epistemological pattern employed for all knowing. He stresses the fact that the theistic belief will be peculiar, but this is only natural when we consider that through it cognization of a unique object is known. The word

"significance" instead of "form" or "meaning" is the key word. The latter words have been used in so many various philosophies that too much time would be required to clarify their meaning and draw out the distinctions necessary for the continuation of the presentation.

The basic characteristic of human experience is the taking on of "significance". It is this fundamental and all persuasive characteristic that permits the conscious experiencing of outer reality; the possession of significance is that which enables us to inhabit and come to terms with our environment.

"Consciousness of a particular kind of environmental significance involves a judgment, implicit or explicit, as to the appropriateness of a particular kind, or range of kinds, of action in relation to that environment."(41) To refer to anything as having objective significance is to reveal its relational aspect since the physical structure functions in relation to human interests. In a Kantian fashion, John Hick says that the correlative mental activity by which the various significances are apprehended involves our interpretation. In addition this interpretative action takes place in relation to types of existence or orders of significance, those

being natural, human, and divine. After having mentioned objective-significance Hick says that it is characteristic for man to live also in a dimension of personality and responsibility. This human significance necessarily follows the realization of the objective significance. To establish the significance of one, it is necessary to recognize and deal with the other; the moral only follows after recognizing the natural significance.

"Has this epistemological paradigm - of one order of significance super-imposed upon and mediated through another - any further implications? . . . As ethical significance interpenetrates natural significance, so religious significance interpenetrates both ethical and natural. The divine is the highest and ultimate order of significance, mediating neither of the others and yet being mediated through both of them." (42)

This "interpretative leap" comes only after one focuses upon experience as a whole. It involves an recognition of situational-significance. It is not a reasoned conclusion or an unreasoned hunch. "It is, putatively, an apprehension of the divine presence within the believer's human experience. It is not an inference to a general truth, but a "divine-human encounter", a mediated meeting with the living God." (43) While this is essentially an epistemological paradigm,

it carries over or is incorporated in and through a way of living. This is the essence of a total being involved with total existence. And after having come to live in terms of this interpretation, we neither require nor can we possibly conceive of a validation process for this cognitive claim. (A discussion of the inability to test these claims, the possibility of their mere psychological existence as opposed to existential existence will be covered later.)

Another unique point is brought to our attention by Hick:

"There is in cognition of every kind an unresolved mystery. The knower-known relationship is in the last analysis <u>sui generis</u>: the mystery of cognition persists at the end of every inquiry though the persistence does not prevent us from cogni ng. (44)

For a moment let us continue discussing the element of mystery and view its role in contemporary science and philosophy. Certain suppositions of the contemporary trends in science and philosophy are that we must demand clarity in our thinking and that all thinking is problem solving. Accordingly mystery originates from a lack of knowledge which science will attempt to overcome and secondly from unclear thinking which

philosophy will eliminate. Contemporary disciplines have as their common goal the elimination of mystery. (45)

Professor Hessert points out that a riddle constitutes a pseudo-problem or involves a confusion of terms. A puzzle contains the elements for a solution and merely requires being put in the correct order. A problem is a situation to which the answer is not given; but with proper plans being established, we may arrive at an answer. He emphasizes that a mystery is still distinct from the three preceding situations. A mystery is unique in that the more you go into it, the more mystery is encountered. Also the more mystery we experience the greater respect we have for its profundity. In addition, the mystery sheds light on other situations, rather than itself. (46)

The <u>sin quo non</u> of mystery is the attitude of wonder. For the Greeks who looked at nature as an eternal principle underlying the sensible world and at science as an intellectual contemplation of the divine object, mystery was never dispelled but always more fully revealed. In modern science, wonder is transferred to man, and he compels nature to answer his questions. Also mathematical language contain no degrees of depth or profundity for modern

science. If we accept Eucledian geometry as our geometrical yardstick and all explanation within the scheme, all more complex or wider application follow necessarily. Diametrically opposed to modern science is the concept of revealed truth which offers multiple levels of depth. The former involves systems of knowledge that are eternal truths, as opposed to the claims of revealed truth that are eternally true. The basic attitudes have changed from contemplation of the self-revealing of nature to human mastery through experimentation.

The mystery referred to by the Holy Bible was not the different elements of man but the difference in man as a whole and God, not what is rational and empirical but what is within man's power and what can be revealed only by God. Mystery is therefore an integral part of religion and religious language. It is very possible that contemporary emphases have made us blind to an integral part of what we are attempting to investigate. We need to seriously consider the fact that maybe we have lost a perspective of existence that is most basic to our cognition of the real depth dimension of reality—the reality that presents us as a total being who needs to be orientated to the objective cosmos. Undoubtedly such a perspective gives us a keener insight into the

transcendental reality referred to by religious language.

Frederick Ferre in Language, Logic and God presents a brief analysis of the various functional uses of. religious language. His supposition is that a functional . analysis is directed toward understanding the genuine use of religious language instead of being directed specifically at the manner in which it is misused. chapter entitled "Familiar Functions of Theological Discourse", a discussion is presented that deals with four different functions of theological languages. According to Ferre the existential language functions as a means of recognizing that all men have certain features in common. To merely drop the "existential situation" referred to with this simple statement and then state that the "central factor" of this situation is the fact that every individual is "one-who-must-die" is certainly a misleading summary. Certainly existential language seems to refer to understandings that are quite common; but its significant function, as a quest, not an seems to be the personal experience that is encountered in the midst of the quest. It is the possibility of authenticity originating from the existential tension. This reality is the significant reference; and it is through the experience of this existential situation

that man encounters a serious and honest quest for the meaning of his existence. It is not the mere objective fact that I must die, but rather the new dimension of personal life that unfolds for the first time through such an experience. Ferre's additional reference to claims concerning "after life" seems to reveal still further his lack of understanding concerning this function of theological language. In his summary he is correct in saying that this language does not need to be theistic. But it seems that this language evolves from a more preliminary situation that can lead to a more thorough understanding of the function of religious language. This is its main attribute, and this is what Ferre is unable to recognize.

A second familiar function of theological discourse concerns ethical commitment. Professor Braithwarte believes the essential function is the statement of moral assertions. Biblical stories are the best example of ethical assertions. These stories are rooted in an agapeistic concern for the individual's relationship to the world and other individuals. Commitment to the agapeistic interpretation requires putting the essential meaning conveyed through these stories into action and secondly responding with one's emotions, feeling, et cetera.

- A. C. Ewing emphasizes that for emotions to respond over a long period of time requires an objective reality. As pointed out before in discussing the essential role of mystery, Ewing does not view commitment to ethical standards as an intellectual conversion. ethics involves commitment of the whole being to an objective reality. Hare attempts to show that the unique function of theological languages is founded in something more basic. The ethical function to which Ewing refers rises out of something more basic. unique expression from which behavior arises is a "belief-content". Again, these explanations as to the function of theological statements are significant, but their superficiality does not bring us closer to any concrete reality. They aren't one of the unique or most revealing functions.
- R. M. Hare says that religious statements really function as a means of expressing quasi-factual beliefs. The word "quasi" (kwā'sī) used in this context means "as if, in a sense or degree", or 'seemingly' factual". As an example of that to which he is referring, Hare sights the conversion of Paul while on the road to Damascus. Paul did not decide to stop persecuting the Jews simply because he thought he ought not act in this manner. Paul's behavior changed as result of understanding a

matter of fact during his encounter with Jesus the. Christ. His behavior was a natural by-product that sprouted from an experiential encounter with quasifact. Hare's discussion of function seems to be more informative because he stresses the fact that this type of language refers to a unique and distinctive reality. what we believe is primary to our outlook upon life. R. M. Hare makes a corollary statement dealing with the relevance of attitude. He believes that attitudes shape our interpretation of facts. Attitudes may be in disagreement, but facts may not. It seems evident that life is organized around attitudes and that "ordinary" facts are the result of active discrimination on our part. "Faith does not supply what is missing in knowledge. It helps us to obtain knowledge, not as a method, but as an attitude in which learning is made possible."(47) This quotation from Professor Hessert's book states explicitly the vital necessity and role played by attitude. But the necessary point to grasp is that attitude and method are not synonymous in this case. Attitude is not the way to truth but is rather an understanding that is the context in which we learn.

But the question arises whether attitude is necessarily logically prior to any facts. If this were so, as Hare states, man's outlook would never change.

It seems that the attitude would be innate or acquired possibly through teaching or at least before any facts. affected the attitude. The facts must grasp you, not you grasp them. Hare views the attitude as making the facts and transcending the facts. Hessert is pointing out that the attitude is not the method. Hare puts faith in Kantian terms when he says that it is an ultimate category of thought and what we recognize as fact is relative to the ultimate category. Ultimate categories imply method of knowing fact, fact relative to category. This way no fact can be disproven. But as Hessert points out, fact is connected with knowledge and knowledge can expose false faith. Therefore, Hare has recognized the necessity of attitude but has incorrectly associated it with the method of acquiring fact. Again the functional analysis has brought to our attention some shortcomings of different views, but also it has exposed new insights.

John Wisdom, who was referred to in section two of this paper, sees the function of theological language as something more than attitudinel. As was pointed out before, the existence of the gardener in his illustration, could not be verified. Although we cannot verify our beliefs, as also the two men in the illustration could not, we can continue our discussion by "directing our attention" to the patterns in the "facts". Pointing

up features in the facts is the method by which the men continued their talk. Therefore, Wisdom believes theological language functions only as an attention—directing device. While this undoubtedly may be a function of theological language, this cannot be the most unique function. It seems very inadequate in the light of the enormous cognitive claim that is at stake. It does not do justice to the claim being made. While this function may have real purpose, and will be referred to later as a part of a larger discussion dealing with Ian Ramsey, we must still attempt to analyze some significant functions that are more fundamental.

Willem Zuurdeeg is quite interested in bringing the analytical approach into a correct perspective by showing that language must necessarily take the human situation into account. As stated earlier, the human situation is intrinsically included in the language situation. With this understanding in mind, we should not view religious language as indicative language. It is much more correct to refer to it as convictional language that is deeptly rooted in the personality. Convictional language is also that which involves all of reality and not merely scientific facts. In additation Zuurdeeg points out another important consideration by distinguishing between the language of systematic

theology and convictional language. The language of systematic theology as opposed to convictional language is something we manipulate, not something that grasps us.

In all honesty Zuurdeeg concludes by saying that convictional language expresses that which is real for a certain individual. He rebels against metaphysics as all analysists do; and therefore, he rejects any transsubjective or transcendental objectivity which this language attempts to express. He fails to go beyond the situation which is real for them. In true existential fashion (Zuurdeeg includes existentialism because it most adequately emphasizes the analysis of the human situation which in turn is an integral part of the language situation,) he sees reality as relative to humans. For this reason language must also be relative. This rules out metaphysics or any reference to fundamental realities. To merely state that something is real for them reveals a function but this function doesn't include a claim to a reality that is ultimate and to which all men must respond with their whole being. This type of language seems to function in an exclusive manner. draws attention to man, not to the community and an . objective cosmos which are the claims of religious language.

Alasdair Mac Intyre draws attention to the function

of myth. By myth man expresses his view of real being. The essential reality which we cannot justify but to which the myths refer requires our commitment to an authority. Theism does not rest upon firm epistemological foundations. The most significant point for the theist "is commitment to belief in these myths as more than useful or inspiring stories." (48) What makes one religion differ from another is the authoritative criteria accepted by and for this self-commitment. This ultimate criteria is the only means of justifying one's commitment. Mac Intyre emphasizes that because it is an ultimate criterion it is not possible according to the very definition to be justified; it is its own criterion. In brief, religion lacks any means of justification.

Although there is a history of apologetics which is integral to the history of theistic thought, this does not seem to refute Mac Intyre's proposal that it is not valid. Just because there is a definite tradition of historical apologetics that has attempted to justify itself before objective criteria of reason and evidence does not mean Mac Intyre is wrong. Apologetics may come up with some significant ramifications full of many insights but this can not be the main or unique function of theological language. It is not the most basic method of pointing out the essential element of

commitment. Apologetics most often assumes commitment. (In addition we might question Ferre's idea that we must convert our language, not instead of argument, but for the sake of meaningful argument. Meaningful argument seems to imply a possible justification through reason and evidence. This is precisely what Mac Intyre is trying to show is impossible.)

Ian T. Ramsey in Religious Language draws our attention to the importance of the logical oddness of theological language. The main thesis of his book is that the services performed by an analysis directed from the perspective of logical empiricism shall be very beneficial to philosophy and theology. The empirical placing of theological phrases will not only be the grounds of a new cooperation, but a new venture altogether. His two main questions are, "What is a religious situation?" and "What kind of empirical anchorage have theological words?"

Ramsey believes the foundation of the religious situation is discernment. Discernment involves a breakthrough. He illustrates this state of affairs by distinguishing between types of knowing. When we know facts about a person (wissen) we have what Bertrand Russell termed "knowledge of description." In addition to this type of knowing, there is the knowing that

involves personal association and trust (kennen). Through this association, and knowing this person through your being known by him in the same sense, there is a sudden disclosure. The individual that you previously knew only through the channel of facts becomes a person. Ramsey refers to this disclosure as a breaking of the ice. This disclosure does not add any facts to the many facts already known. The fundamental difference comes through the encounter which brings no new facts but rather a person into focus. This personal encounter is not psychological in so far as they would reduce religion to what would be called a subjective experience.

"Let us emphasize, without any possibility of misunderstanding, that all these situations, all these characteristically different situations, when they occur, have an objective reference and are, as all situations, subject-object in structure. When situations "come alive", or the "ice breaks", there is objective depth in these situations along with and alongside any subjective changes."(49)

In addition to an odd discernment, there is a response of total commitment which is the second part of a religious situation. When we try illustrating the different types of commitment such as mathematical

commi

that all of our examples refer not to what religious commitment actually is but only what it is like. It is only what logically corresponds to religious language. For example, we know a man who is "wrapped up" in sailing. His commitment to sailing causes his everyday language to be colored by it. This commitment carries over into all he says and does. When committing ourselves to a lover, we organize the whole of our life around another being. It causes a personal revolution. This is where personal commitment goes beyond the mathematical options which involve no heart searching.

"So we see religious commitment as a <u>total</u> commitment to the <u>whole</u> universe; something in relation to which argument has only a very odd function, its purpose being to tell such a tale as evokes the insight, the 'discernment' from which the commitment follows as a response." (50)

In addition, our religious commitment is bound up in key words whose logic resembles the logic of words used in describing personal and mathematical commitment. It has "key-words suited to the whole job of living
!apex! words."(51) While it may resemble other logical

uses of linguistics, it is objective language that has been given very special qualifications. It is objective language that reveals "logical impropriety". We qualify religious language to stress that its reference is in part beyond the language in which it is clothed. "The same is true about "God"; and the central problem of theology is how we use, how to qualify, observational language so as to be suitable currency for what in part exceeds it - the situations in which theology is founded." (52) Then the function of theological language is to evoke discernment and commitment through the use of objective words that exhibit logical peculiarities but refer to a religious situation with objective reality. It is a currency for discernment.

One of the many examples of logical impropriety is the topographical oddness. This involves inverting commas, hyphens, or capital letters to otherwise straightforward words. Examples of this would be 'authentic' or 'being-in-a-situation'. Another oddness is gained by using words "technically" in a sense that it is never defined at one point but is used with frequency so that it is defined in its use or it gains "meaning in use". An example of this would be the word "existential". (53)

Ian Crombie in Faith and Logic stresses the idea

that theological language functions as an establishment of a "reference range". Thus it functions "by eliminating all improper objects of reference (like finite things or empirical events) from theistic discussions and by suggesting the realms of non-theological discourse (ethical, historical, cosmological, and so on) to which theological speech is somehow relevant. "(54) We then see that the logical "oddness" of theological speech functions in a semantical fashion. This language does take on significance because of its reference. Parables become more significant and through them we find the real meaning of words in a real theological context. the context of the parable they have their appropriate "reference range" and most adequately function as theological language. Crombie believes that all language about God must be some way used in a parabolic setting. But the parable is not that with which we stop. For the Christian the parable points to reality beyond itself. The truth to which the parables witness does not correspond literally to that which is referred to in the parable. It is the trust of the Christian that as a reliable parable we are not misled as to its real significance and actual reality. Crombie goes a step beyond Mac Intyre's logic of sheer witness. He does not simply say that this is a reliable parable or image

because the believer is impelled to believe it.

Instead Crombie concludes by developing the idea that through our constant attempt to use images, light is cast by the images and provides us with a better understanding of the reality to which the image refers. The idea that "logical images are capable of illuminating one's understanding of the world," gives a new and vital significance to theological language. The idea that "illimination" is as significant as "impulsion" provides a new justification and makes a further investigation of images or analogies relevant.

The main purpose of this section has been directed toward a functional analysis of theological language. Unfortunately the analysis has brought to our attention many different functions the language may serve but has still not disclosed any conclusive discernment of a reality to which this language is referring. Though the language may serve various functions we still do not know if the language experiential reality that claims a response of our entire personality.

Susanne Langer, in her book, Philosophy in a New Key, attempts to make an honest analysis of the types, qualities, or different levels of linguistic communications. Her main emphasis is the demarcation made between

discursive and presentational language.

According to Professor Langer, language is related - to reality by means of the "law of projection". To some people only discursive language, that which is language put in peculiar order, can be spoken. There is expression in a different sense which refers to feelings, emotion, and desires. This language does not represent, but expresses. This "genuine type of semantics" goes beyond and fills in the gaps of discursive language which is not the only articulate form of symbolism. (55) Her main assumption is "wherever symbol operates, there is meaning." (56) It is important to notice that "presentational semantics" (Does "semantics" here mean the same thing it does for the logical positivists?) is not conceived through language; but after having been experienced, it is preserved in an attitude and gains expression through interplay with other aspects of experience. The most highly developed form of connotational semantics is music.

But there still remains a certain vagueness concerning the ability of language to communicate the religious reality. When employing language to communicate a reality, we most always sense a direct awareness or participation in the reality. But with religious language, as we analyze it, we feel once

removed from the reality; and therefore, a vague or hazy communication is sensed by almost every one. Then we begin to question whether the language is actually communicating any reality at all. If there is a reality, its meaning and significance seem to have transcended the analysis. The primary question seems to be, "How can we communicate through language a transcendental subject?"

John A. Hutchinson in his article, "The Religious Use of Language" expresses the thought that religion condensed to its very essence involves symbols for the ultimate meaning of human existence. This reality which is then communicated in a symbolic manner is independent of the mind, but the mind can only find expression and fulfillment in the symbols. Hutchinson states that religious statements are anological and metaphorical. Analogy is the only means of communicating the reality of the transcendental object. Professor Paul Hessert pointed out i. a , an, an anology is an identity of relation and not of essence. The bravery of a boy is not that of a man, but there may be a relation between their bravery. Religious language is poetical or imaginative. Such religious images are differentiated from concepts by their immediacy. After explaining this point in more

detail, he defines a religious experience as being hit by such images and responding to them. His third and fourth point are that this language must express ultimate meaning, that which is independent of and gives meaning to all other concerns, and that it is referring to a unique object that can be indicated but not defined. It is a holy language. In summary, he believes that religious language has an emotive meaning that is taken existentially.

Now that we have been exposed to the area of symbolism, let us pursue the interest further. "In man's search for what it means to be and to stay human, he returns perennially to symbols for the expression of ultimate meaning." (57) This statement is made in the Editor's Preface to the September 1955 issue of The Christian Scholar. And it is more that an ample introduction to Paul Tillich's thoughts is his article, "Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God".

Tillich begins by recognizing that the logical positivists have helped make us aware that we have no clearing house for communication. He also assumes and explicitly states that levels of reality exist and these levels are different. Each level demands a different language and approach. Tillich approaches

and interprets religious language as being essentially symbolic.

A sign indicates the existence of something beyond itself. It is one aspect of a larger whole (e.g.
smoke is one aspect of the fire), and our real concern
is with the "pointed to" reality. A symbol is also
employed to represent some reality although it is not
a proxy for that reality. Both the sign and the symbol
point to something beyond themselves but signs do not
participate in the meaning and power of that to which
it is referring as symbols do.

"Every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate." (58) The symbol is then a representation that opens up a level of reality otherwise hidden and unable to be grasped in any other manner. For Tillich, the opening-up process involves the opening up of reality in deeper levels and the opening-up of the inner man in special levels. It opens up reality and the soul. Thus the symbol brings us to a new dimension of life. A sign such as the stop light is invented and can be replaced by a different light, but a symbol has a special function. Each symbol serves for one specific function—it cannot be replaced. Symbols are the result of a situation; they are born out of a group that

acknowledges in a word, a flag or any specific symbol a part of their being. When the inner situation or conviction dies, the symbol dies. A symbol is born and dies but is not invented. The question he seems to beg is, "By what criterion will we judge between symbols if they represent an ultimate reality"? If the symbol dies it is because the situation dies. Are there any abiding or ultimate symbols and can the religious situation die?

Religious symbols open up "the depth dimension of reality itself, the dimension of reality which is the ground of every other dimension and every other depth, and which therefore, is not one level beside the others but is the fundamental level, the level below all other levels, the level of being itself, or the ultimate power of being." These symbols open the experience of the dimension of this depth in the human soul. Symbols are born and die according to the changed relationship with the ultimate ground of being - God. The Ground of Being transcends any symbol. If a symbol should be taken as unconditional it is demonic.

There are two fundamental levels in all religious symbols (i.e. the transcendent level and the immanent level). The most basic symbol on the transcendental level would be the Ground of  $B_{\rm e}$ ing - God. But can we

say that his is only the unconditional ground of being? The awareness of the reality is not symbolic, but in our relationship we must symbolize — and the relationship is experienced only as we encounter him with the wholeness of our being which is a person, a being. That element which is infinite and unconditional, yet transcendental, and that which is adequate to knowing him through a person relationship are the two essential elements that always must be foremost in our transcendental symbols. The attributes and the æts of God are also included under transcendental sumbols. The second level, the immanent level, involves the level of the divine in time and space. Under this section Tillich discusses the incarnation, sacraments, and sign-symbols.

Tillich concludes his article with his ideas concerning the truth of religious symbols. Symbols are independent of any empirical criticism. A symbol is alive as long as the situation out of which it was born still has significance. "Their truth is their adequacy to the religious situation in which they are created, and their inadequacy to another situation is their untruth." (60) Again his conclusion leads to relativism unless he intended his reference to "situation" to imply ultimate situation. Even if this is what he intended, it would seem to be reasoning circulus in probando. The absolute

statement concerning the truth is that no symbol is ultimate. No symbol can take the place of the ultimate without becoming demonic. No matter what the symbol might be, it is conditional and must deny the idolatrous tendency within itself. The criterion for any Christian symbol is its clarity in representing or being a concept, but not the thing in itself.

I am sure that we would agree with Thomas Aquinas and Paul Tillich that God can never be an object of the mind. In my estimation most of our language is constructed as a result of objects we experience being able to become objects of the mind and thereby becoming conceptualized. It is conceivable that anological language which does not refer to the essence of two objects but rather a relation that exists between the objects might be the only way of overcoming this barrier of communication through religious language. It seems that most communication involves conceptual language and not a perceptual language. We are able to form a concept of a tree; and because other humans have experienced a tree and it is possible to have a tree as an object of the mind, we are able to linguistically communicate in a dialogue the reality of the tree. Such things as love and attitude seem to be excluded from the categories of those things which are or can be the object of our

mind. Therefore, unless it is possible through analogy, they seem to also be excluded from the possibility of being communicated by language as we know it today.

Even if we are able to use anological language to communicate a reality between those who have already experienced the reality, the question still remains, "How are we to communicate this reality by anological language or communicate it in any manner to those who have not experienced such an encounter?"

Geddes Mac Gregor in his article "The Nature of Religious Utterance" brings to the surface the idea that the failure of theological communications is not necessarily failure in the use of language (assuming language is capable of expressing all realities). is more often a symptom of confused standpoints. the word "standpoint" he means the presuppositions and types of questions to which they give rise and the outlook on things which result. (61) Professor H. A. Hodges in his book Language, Standpoints, and Attitudes believes that each standpoint has a language; and when the languages are confused, it is merely a symptom of confused standpoints. He forsees that philosophy will become a standpoint analysis, not a linguistic analysis. Such a philosophy will require an understanding of the standpoint it considers, a certain sense of a dramatic study, a dialectical approach, a normative structure so as to allow a judgment between standpoints and will provide an existential judgment. But again I feel that we must point out that an existential choice must be made. The question still remains, "How does one make the choice?" It seems we make a choice by being grasped or confronted by a reality. the Christian problem involves the ability to communicate the reality to others. The central problem with which we started still remains - "Can we use language to communicate ultimate reality?" Some people would reply that all the Christian can do is trust that their words will be a witness to the reality and thereby give the reality an opportunity to reveal itself. Or some will agree with Mac Gregor that theological statements only have meaning as they are put in liturgical form or some imperative form.

In this paper a study has been made of traditional ontology, contemporary philosophy, types of verifications, and types of analyses. It has involved a preoccupation with semantics and religious reality. No matter what ideas might have seemed to be the answer at one time, we cannot escape the conclusion that the intended semantic reference of theological discourse is to an ontological reality. This has been and seems to be the

main conviction of Christians.

In way of conclusion, let us think for a moment about the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29) or the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-15). In either one of these statements Jesus was using language to communicate ultimate reality. And Christians today repeat and pray them in order that the reality might be communicated to the men of this generation. Let us take both of these statements and view them in the light of this entire paper. We might conclude that these statements have an ontological reference. Undoubtedly those who have never experienced such a reality would attempt a verification of the referents. Others would analyze the various functions or attempt to find logical coherence in the statements. Some would say that these statements serve as an emotive or ethical function. Others would say they serve a responsive, or imperative function or would make analytical games out of these serious endeavors to communicate reality. Still others would be driven back to a standpoint-analysis which appears to offer a better solution than any other isolated method.

In all fairness I think we would admit that these statements of Jesus and other religious statements do provide a basis of communication for Christians today. But keeping in mind that the good news of gospel is

for those who have not experienced such a reality (the lost sheep), we need to question whether language was Jesus' most effective way of communicating this real

Most basically we need to ask whether it was the language that opened up new levels of reality for those who heard Jesus speak or whether it was possibly communicated more effectively in some other manner.

According to the gospels, Jesus' most effective communication was his authority, and his authority was what he started and increased. In other words, Jesus' real communication was by what he did, not his language.

In conclusion, two main ideas have evolved through this paper. Different types of reality are opened up through different types of language - the various functions of theological language as we have found them. The other idea is that language is inadequate and certainly not the most effective manner of communicating ultimate reality. What a man is and does is more able to communicate the ultimate reality of the human situation.

Today, we are in search of a more intellectual understanding and communication of the ultimate reality. The reason for introducing the gospel in the concluding thoughts was because the Christian who

makes religious statements, whether he be theologian, minister, or an everyday man, must justify his communication according to his one model - Jesus the Christ. This is the one criterion of his ontology and its manner of communication.

The problem is still with us and I am certain always will be in future generation. "Can we communicate ultimate reality?" Is it possible that a new understanding of what language is, how it functions, and what it is capable of communicating will allow mankind to communicate ultimate reality? Or is language inadequate and we must seek a more effective manner of communicating ultimate reality? Or might real communication of ultimate reality only become a reality after both alternatives are simultaneously developed to their utmost? It seems plausable that the real solution to our problem rests with a better understanding and proper use of language and a more thorough investigation of non-linguistic means of communication! Only the energetic and vitally concerned will provide contemporary theology and philosophy with guiding insights.

### FOOTNOTES

- 1. The Editor's Preface, The Christian Scholar Vol. XXXVIII No.3 September, 1955 pp.171-172
- 2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u>
  4.04
- 3. Notes taken from a lecture presented by Paul Hessert in Philosophy of Religion
- 4. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology. Vol. I, p.18
- 5. <u>Ibid</u>. pp.18-20
- 6. <u>Ibid.</u> p.21
- 7. E.W. Hall, "Metaphysics", Living Schools of Philosophy edited by D.D. Jones p.131
- 8. <u>Ibid</u>. p.145
- 9. <u>Ibid</u>. p.152
- 10. D.C. Macintosh, "Theology and Metaphysics", Living Schools of Philosophy, edited by D.D. Jones pp. 181-189
- 11. Ibid. p.181
- 12. Paul Tillich, op. cit. p.12
- 13. <u>Ibid</u>. p.23
- 14. <u>Ibid</u>. p. 24
- 15. "General Introduction" as printed in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, edited by Flew and Macintyre
- 16. Willem Zuurdeeg, An Analyitical Philosophy of Religion, p. 13
- 17. Notes taken from a lecture by William Hordern in the Meaning and Purpose of Theological Language.
- 18. Willem Zuurdeeg, op. cit. p.18 (Within his sentence, Zuurdeeg quotes Lichenberger.)
- 19. William Hoerber, A Scientific Foundation of Philosophy p. 3

- 20. <u>Idem</u>.
- 21. Rudolf Carnap, Introduction to Semantics, p.3
- 22. <u>Ibid</u>. p.12
- 23. Idem.
- 24. Ibid. p.28
- 25. Bertrand Russell, The Wisdom of the West, p.157
- 26. Federick Mayer, A History of Modern Philosophy, p. 574
- 27. Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Book, p. 27
- 28. Bertrand Russell, op. cit., p.157
- 29. Frederick Ferre, Language, Logic, and God, pp. 8-18
- 30. A.F. Ayer, Language Truth and Logic, p. 26
- 31. A.F. Ayer, Logical Positivism, p.56
- 32. <u>Ibid</u>. p.59
- 33. <u>Idem</u>.
- 34. Frederick Ferre, op. cit., p.32
- 35. <u>Ibid.</u>, p.39 (Within this passage, Ferre is quoting from Cox.)
- 36. A.F. Ayer, Logical Positivism, pp.73-74
- 37. Victor Kraft, The Vienna Circle, p. 39
- 38. Frederick Ferre, op. cit., p.54
- 39. Willem Zuurdeeg, "The Implications of Analyitical Philosophy for Theology", The Journal of Bible and Religion, July, 1961, p. 208
- 40. John Hick, Faith and Knowledge, p.95
- 41. <u>Ibid</u>. p.113
- 42. <u>Ibid</u>. p.127

- 43. <u>Ibid</u>. p.129
- 44. <u>Ibid</u>. p.132
- 45. Michael B. Foster, <u>Mystery and Philosophy</u>, This paragraph is a summary of Chapter I.
- 46. Notes taken from a lecture presented by Paul Hessert in Philosophy of Religion.
- 47. Paul Hessert, <u>Introduction</u> to <u>Christianity</u>, p.29
- 48. Frederick Ferre, op. cit., p.141
- 49. Ian T. Ramsey, Religious Language, pp. 27-28
- 50. <u>Ibid</u>. p.37
- 51. <u>Idem</u>.
- 52. <u>Ibid</u>. p. 38
- 53. <u>Ibid</u>. p. 40
- 54. Frederick Ferre. op. cit., p.143
- 55. Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, p.81
- 56. <u>Ibid</u>. p.90
- 57. The Edtor's Preface to The Christian Scholar September, 1955, p.172
- 58. Paul Tillich, "Religious Symbols and Cur Knowledge of God", The Christian Scholar, September, 1955, p.191
- 59. <u>Ibid</u>. p.192
- 60. <u>Ibid</u>. p.196
- 61. Geddes MacGregor, "The Nature of Religious Utterance", The Christian Scholar, September, 1955, pp. 178-179

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ayer, Alfred Jules. <u>Language</u>, <u>Truth and Logic</u>.

  New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950
- Ayer, Alfred Jules. Logical Positivism.
  Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959
- Carnap, Rudolf. <u>Introduction to Semantics</u>.
  Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942
- Ferre, Frederick. Language, Logic and God. New York: Harper Brothers, Publishers, 1961
- Flew, Anthony and Macintyre, Alasdair. New Essays in Philosophical Theology. London: SCM Press, 1955
- Foster, Michael B. Mystery and Philosophy. London: SCM Press, 1957
- Hessert, Paul. <u>Introduction to Christianity</u>. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1958
- Hick, John. Fai .. a Knowledge.
  Ithica, New York: Cornel University Press, 1957
- Hodges, H.A. Language, Standpoints, and Attitudes. London: Oxford University Press, 1953
- Kraft, Victor. The Vienna Circle "The Origin of Neo-Positivism". New York: Philosophical Library, 1953
- Langer, Susanne. Philosophy in a New Key. New York: Mentor Books, The New American Library, 1959
- Martin, C.B. Religious Belief.
  Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959
- Mascall, E.I. Words and Images. New York: Ronald Press, 1957
- Mitchell, Basil (ed.). Faith and Logic. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957
- Ramsey, I.T. Religious Language. London: SCM Press, 1957

- Tillich, Paul. <u>Systematic Theology</u>, Vol. I. Chicago: Universtiy Press, 1951
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. The Blue and Brown Books. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958
- Ziff, Paul. <u>Semantical Analysis</u>.
  Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960
- Zuurdeeg, Willem F. An Analytical Philosophy of Religion. New York: Abingdon Press, 1958

## ARTICLES

- Editor's Preface, The ."The Relevance of Contemporary Analytical Philosophy"for the Community of Christian Scholars". The Christian Scholar: Fall 1960
- Hall, Everett, "Metaphysics" Living Schools of Philosophy, ed. D.D. Runes. Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1958
- Hutchinson, John. "The Religious Use of Language," The Christian Scholar. September, 1955
- Kennick, W.E. "Language of Religion", Philosophical Review. January, 1960
- Klemke, E.D. "Are Religious Statements Meaningful?" Journal of Religion. January, 1960
- MacGregor, Geddes. "The Nature of Religious Utterance" The Christian Scholar. September, 1955
- Mackintosh, D.C. "Theology and Metaphysics" Living Schools of Philosophy. ed. D.D. Runes, 1958
- Osborn, Robert. "Contemporary Criticism of Christian Language" The Journal of Bible and Religion.

  January 1962
- Tillich, Paul. "Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God," The Christian Scholar. September 1955
- Zuurdeeg, Willem. "The Implications of Analytical Philosophy for Theology" The Journal of Bible and Religion. July 1961

1 - 1

Zuurdeeg, Willem. "The Nature of Theological Language" Journal of Religion. January 1960

#### GENERAL REFERENCE BOOKS

Hoerber, William. A Scientific Foundation of Philosophy. Los Angeles: W.H. Hoerber, 1952

Mayer, Frederick. A <u>History of Modern Philosophy</u>. New York: American Book Co., 1951

Russell, Bertrand. <u>Wisdom of the West</u>.

Garden City New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959

## ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Christian Scholar, The. Fall 1960

Ferre, Frederick. Language, Logic and God.
New York: Mentor Books, The New American Library, 1961

Zuurdeeg, Willem. An Analytical Philosophy of Religion. New York: Abingdon Press, 1958

#### Journal of Philosophical Theological Research (JPTR)

Vol. 21 • No. 3 • Autumn 2019 • Issue 81 Print ISSN: 9791-1735 | Online ISSN: 2538-2500

## Does Tillich Have A Hidden Debt To Kant?

Stephen R. Palmquist \*

Received: 20/03/2019 | Accepted: 15/04/2019

#### **Abstract**

After briefly recounting a strange, quasi-mystical experience I had while first reading Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, I devote most of this article to exploring various similarities between theories Kant developed and ideas more commonly associated with Paul Tillich. Hints are drawn from Chris Firestone's book, Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason, which argues that my interpretation of Kant echoes themes in Tillich's ontology. Among the themes whose Kantian roots I explore are Tillich's theories of: God as the Ground of Being; faith as ultimate concern; courage as the proper life-choice in the face of the anxiety that naturally arises out of an honest response to the human situation, given our fundamental alienation from the divine; the crucial role of cultural symbols in bringing faith into historically realistic expressions; political forms as ideally selfnegating; and love as a gift that we must express with power and justice in order to be efficacious. After considering whether Kant influenced Tillich more than Tillich ever admitted, I conclude by wondering if my own effort to develop an "affirmative" interpretation of Kant's theory of religion may have itself had a hidden influence from my prior reading of Tillich.

# Keywords

Immanuel Kant, Paul Tillich, faith as ultimate concern, courage, symbols, self-negating politics, love as gift.

<sup>■</sup> Palmquist. S. R. (2019). Does Tillich Have A Hidden Debt To Kant. *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research*, 21(81), 73-88. doi: 10.22091/jptr.2019.4191.2093



<sup>\*</sup> Professor of Philosophy, Dept. of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China | stevepq@hkbu.edu.hk

People sometimes ask why, as I approach my 40<sup>th</sup> year of scholarly research, I cannot pull myself away from doing research on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, especially his interpretation of religion. The answer – insofar as I can plumb the depths of my own inward motivations – goes back to an uncanny experience I had in March of 1981, when I read through Kant's Critique of Pure Reason for the first time, almost exactly 200 years after its initial publication. During twelve consecutive days when time seemed to stand still, I did little else but eat, sleep, and digest the ideas expressed in the first Critique. During that process, almost from beginning to end, I repeatedly felt that I knew what Kant was going to say on the next page. I do not mean that I knew what words would appear there, of course. Rather, I felt a deep, almost ineffable sense that, if I understand Kant correctly, then on the next page he should go on to argue suchand-such. And when I turned the page, sure enough, the claim I had anticipated would appear before my eyes, just as if it had been written especially for me – or even, perhaps, by me! During that heady fortnight as a 23-year-old, first-year doctoral student at Oxford University, I began to wonder whether this might be evidence for the Buddhist theory of reincarnation.

Three years earlier, as an undergraduate Religious Studies major at a Christian liberal arts college in California, I had attended a Contemporary Theology course that included a challenging introduction to Kant's philosophy as part of its philosophical prolegomena. On the last day of the lectures on Kant, the professor sternly warned us not to be tempted by Kantian reason, exclaiming: "No single philosopher has done more damage to the Christian religion than Immanuel Kant!" The only three major theologians whose ideas were covered in the lectures, after the lengthy post-Kantian background to twentieth-century theology had been sketched, were Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. At the front of that class, taught in the spring semester of 1978, sat a triumvirate of my more vocal classmates, all of whom also eventually became professors of philosophy and/or theology. Most notable among them was Philip Clayton, who went on to study under Pannenberg, carrying his mentor's torch well into the twenty-first century. Upon Pannenberg's death in 2014, Clayton wrote: "Two hundred years from now, historians of theology will describe the work of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg as the two theological giants of the mid-20th century." Many contemporary philosophers and theologians, I

<sup>1.</sup> Clayton currently serves as the Ingraham Professor at Claremont School of Theology. Our two notable classmates in that Contemporary Theology class were Jim Taylor (Professor of Philosophy at our alma mater, Westmont College) and Kevin Vanhoozer (Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School).

<sup>2.</sup> Quoted from www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2014/09/07/wolfhart-pannenberg-1928-2014/, Clayton's online obituary in honor of Pannenberg.

suspect, would need little convincing that Clayton omitted one crucial name! Perhaps Clayton's glaring omission of arguably the greatest mid-twentiethcentury theologian, at least as far as the depth of his philosophical grounding is concerned, is at least partially due to the way our teacher in that formative course portrayed Paul Tillich. I still vividly recall my shock, as I sat quietly at the back of the classroom, when our teacher ended his last lecture on Tillich by passing off his entire theology as hardly worthy of a response from Christian philosophers, given that Tillich was - so the professor claimed - a self-confessed atheist. My three older classmates (see note 1), who often engaged the teacher with frequent feedback from their vantage point in the front row, seemed to accept this harsh dismissal of Tillich as a foregone conclusion. I may not have completed the assigned readings on Kant that semester, but I had avidly completed the Tillich readings and was convinced that our beloved professor had badly missed the point of Tillich's theological system. It took me three more years and a trip across the Atlantic before I began to realize that he was wrong about Kant too. Still, that introduction to Kant, as the philosopher who changed the tide of Protestant theology for the following two centuries, planted a seed which, when fertilized in the soil of my natural tendency to go against the status quo, surely contributed to my fascination with the Critique of Pure Reason in 1981, when it seemed to me that Kant was merely expressing in philosophical terms what I had already learned from my youthful immersion in the Bible.

Although most of my publications in the past 35 years have been on Kant, I jumped at the chance to write a paper on Tillich when a colleague and former student, Keith Chan, told me he was co-organizing a Tillich conference in mid-2015. I immediately realized that this would be an ideal opportunity for me to stand back and take stock of how, if at all, my appreciation for Tillich's theology might have changed, after spending three and a half decades focusing my research on Kant's philosophical corpus. In the end, my need to put the finishing touches on my Comprehensive Commentary (i.e., Palmquist, 2016) around the time of the conference prevented me from getting "back to Tillich" as deeply as I had hoped. The present article, however, aims to fill many of those gaps by revising and extending that conference paper.

Ten years ago another former HKBU student, Chris Firestone, published a book entitled Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason, in which he compared three recent Kant interpreters to three twentieth-century theologians. Somewhat to my surprise, and without prior consultation with

<sup>1.</sup> My first publication, Palmquist, 1984, dealt with the proper status and role of Kant's (alleged) "transcendental arguments" and argued that "faith" (Glaube) is not merely a practical/moral concept for Kant, but also plays a crucial theoretical role in his Critical system.

me, Firestone devoted his Chapter Six to my interpretation of Kant, comparing it with Tillich's theology via some reflections on Rudolf Otto's work on the nature of religious experience. Claiming that I, like Otto, view Kant's Religion book as a "fourth Critique" – which I do not! – Firestone argues that my Kant takes metaphysics and ontology far more seriously than many other interpreters have claimed - which I do! Perhaps the most relevant of Firestone's claims, for the purposes of this article, is that Kant (if interpreted through the perspectival framework I employed in Kant's System of Perspectives, Kant's Critical Religion, and various other publications) is actually far more mystically inclined than he has often been given credit for. As we shall see, one of Tillich's key criticisms of Kant was that he was overly formalistic and therefore lacked appreciation for the importance of religious experience; I have argued, by contrast, that Kant's whole philosophy can be regarded as the philosophical foundation for a "Critical Mysticism" (see especially Palmquist, 2019). While I do not agree with all of the claims and conclusions Firestone reaches in his study of the Kant-Tillich–Palmquist relation, his chapter does provide at least some prima facie evidence that the topic of this article is worth exploring. <sup>1</sup> I shall, therefore, adopt a two-pronged approach. First, I will briefly sketch seven areas of broad agreement that I detect between Kant's philosophy and Tillich's theology, focusing mainly on the Kant side of this equation since that is the material I know best. I shall then examine a broad range of Tillich's writings to ascertain the extent to which he himself acknowledged such similarities.

First, and – as far as ontology and metaphysics are concerned – surely foremost, Tillich's notion of God as "being itself" or the "ground of being" has obvious Kantian roots. In the first Critique Kant refers to God as one of the three "ideas of reason": as the synthetic term of the triad whose first terms are *immortality* and *freedom*, the idea of *God* constitutes the whole aim and content of metaphysics; vet our necessary theoretical ignorance of the objects to which these three ideas point creates a problem for us human beings which is by its very nature irresolvable. We cannot live meaningful lives without these concepts, according to Kant; yet no matter how hard we may try, we also cannot obtain certain knowledge of the objects that these ideas seem to designate. In other words, we can (indeed, we must) think

<sup>1.</sup> Further evidence appears in Love 2010, who emphasizes what he calls Tillich's "turn toward religious pluralism" (pp. 568-569; see also p. 572) and its roots in Kant's theory of religion. Love detects a clear parallelism between Kant's and Tillich's respective theories of religious conversion (p. 569), but argues that Tillich's appeal to "ultimate concern as the main criterion for judging religions" (p. 570) is significantly weaker as a tool for assessing the success of a given empirical religion in passing the test of rationality than Kant's own criteria for rational religion, as laid out in what I have called his "first experiment" in Religion (see Palmquist, 2000a, Ch. VII).

"God" as the "ens realissimum" (i.e., the most real being); but because of the very nature of what it would mean to be such a being-of-all-beings, we as embodied beings can never "intuit" God as such and therefore can never obtain empirical cognition of God as "a being". Moreover, this God-concept that we *must* think but *cannot* know is inherently paradoxical: Kant insists that God's nature must contain within it every possible predicate. Indeed, one of Kant's first books, published 18 years before the first *Critique*, argued that God is the *ground* of all possibility. Tillich is assuming all of this, it seems to me, whenever he calls God the ground of being.

Without appreciating the depths of these Kantian roots of Tillich's Godconcept (as apparently my undergraduate theology professor did not), one is bound to misunderstand a second claim of Tillich's, that God does not "exist". For Tillich, this means that God does not "stand out" (ex-sistere) from the rest of being, because God is not a thing among other things, but is, as it were, the background out from which all existing things stand. As Kant put it. "existence" (Dasein) is one of the twelve categories: as the second category of "modality", it predetermines that everything we can know as an "existing" object must, by virtue of that very claim, be regarded as a being within the phenomenal world, rather than (what Kant calls) a noumenal being, for a noumenal being is self-existing. According to Kant, the idea of such a selfexisting being just is the idea of God. When Tillich claims that God does not "exist", he simply means that God transcends the possibility of being known by the human mind; it does not mean that God is not *real* or *actual* (Wirklich). On the contrary, God for Kant – as, I submit, for Tillich – is so ultimately real/actual that even to use such terms runs into potential conflict with the limits of human language and reason. For both Kant and Tillich, God is a presence that can be experienced, even though the mode of such experience does not enable us to make a science out of it.

A third Kantian influence can be seen in Tillich's highly influential account of faith in terms of ultimate concern. Although Kant never uses the term "ultimate concern", he does employ similar notions throughout his book, Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason (1793/1794; hereafter Religion). For Tillich, genuine ultimate concern contrasts with idolatry, inasmuch as those who put their faith in what is not genuinely ultimate are, in effect, worshipping an idol. Kant develops just such a theory of idolatry, near the end of his book (*Religion*, p. 185; see also p. 199), when he claims that all human beings have a natural tendency to "make a God for ourselves" (p. 168); this is not necessarily a problem, Kant argues, provided that one subordinates this inevitable "anthropomorphic" concept of what I think God wants me to do to what Kant calls the "supreme" or "ultimate" (oberste) maxim, which is the only proper object of human "volition" (Willkür). In short, to aim in all our actions to make the "good principle" the highest commitment to which we direct what Kant calls our "heart" (Herz) or "conviction" (Gesinnung) is the key to ensuring that we practice true religion rather than idolatry. Kant calls this "moral faith" and fully recognizes that it inevitably exists alongside what he calls "historical faith". Contrary to the most common way of interpreting Kant, whereby he is portrayed as seeking to destroy Christianity and all other historical faiths, I read him as encouraging them to be fruitful and multiply, as long as the adherents avoid the idolatrous assumption that the God of historical religion is above and therefore a higher concern than, God as Ultimate. Again, I believe anyone familiar with Tillich's way of talking about faith (e.g., in his book, Dynamics of Faith) will easily recognize this emphasis on ultimate concern as vintage Tillich - though as Love 2010 rightly argued (see previous footnote). Tillich's own employment of the term suffers from a problem of being rather diffuse and poorly defined, whereas Kant's criteria for holding a particular concern to be genuinely ultimate are comparatively clear and precise (see Palmquist 2000a, Chapter VII, for details).

Fourth and more briefly, Kant explicitly appeals to courage in the form of what he calls "firm resolve [festen Vorsatz]" (Religion, pp. 24n, 49n), as the proper life-choice in the face of the inevitable "anxiety" of the human situation – and the very word Kant uses here is the now-familiar ängst (Religion, pp.24n, 146n), later popularized by Kierkegaard.<sup>2</sup> Although we are in one sense fundamentally alienated from the divine (namely, whenever we adopt the theoretical standpoint that aims at knowledge), in another, equally valid sense (namely, whenever we adopt the practical standpoint that aims at virtue), we have direct access to the presence of God within us, in the form of our awareness of the moral law. Of course, Tillich develops his concept of courage far more fully than Kant does, so a detailed look at Tillich's portrayal of courage would inevitably reveal many differences from Kant's; my point here is therefore not to imply that Tillich copied Kant, but only that there is more overlap than is often acknowledged.

Fifth, both Kant and Tillich emphasize the crucial role played by cultural symbols in bringing faith into historically realistic expressions. In Religion, Kant argues that, in the face of human ignorance of the transcendent, symbols are the only possible ways we have to grasp the reality that is God (Religion, pp. 64-5n). Kant himself illustrates, with numerous examples, how historically contingent symbols can effectively transmit the ultimate truth of religion. The irony here, of course, is that symbols are one and all

<sup>1.</sup> For a detailed defense of this reading of Kant on historical faith, whereby the latter serves as a necessary component of any lived religion and is acceptable as long as it serves as a vehicle for the pure rational faith (that is, moral religion) at its core, see Palmquist, 2015.

<sup>2.</sup> See especially Kierkegaard's 1844 masterpiece, The Concept of Anxiety. For a discussion of the Kant-Kierkegaard relationship, see Palmquist, 2000b.

historical; yet they are somehow able to convey a truth that is eternal. They can fulfill this role, Kant insists, only if we interpret them in terms of what Kant calls their "inwardness"; once we begin to take our religious symbols literally, they become idols. And as Kant argues in the climactic penultimate section of Religion – a section of the book that few commentators seem to have read – idols are bound to serve as obstacles to a healthy conscience, rather than to empower us to have the strength to live in the power of inwardness that is human conscience. Obviously, Kant did not engage with the details of his own culture in anything like the depth that Tillich did with his; yet he gave his full blessing to those who do -as long as they do not treat the symbols of their historical tradition as their ultimate concern.

My sixth point of comparison will be far briefer than the topic deserves. In Religion's Third Piece, Kant argues that humanity as a whole has a unique duty to develop what he calls an "ethical community", and that the only possible way this duty can be fulfilled is if there is a God who can serve as the inward guarantor of the unity that is sought by those who join this ethical community. As such, the ethical community can succeed, he insists, only if it takes the form of a *church*. Kant's much-neglected theory of the church argues that, whereas those who set up specific religious congregations must employ some political structuring mechanism, they must also always remain aware that the proper essence of the "invisible church", being ethical, is thoroughly non-political. As an ethical *community*, the church by definition has a political structure that is paradoxically *non*-political. With this in mind, Kant proposes a form of community-building whereby the basic principles of organization must be self-negating to serve their proper purpose.<sup>2</sup> This view, though condensed within a few tightly argued pages of Kant's Religion and therefore very easy to miss, bears an uncanny resemblance to Tillich's theory of theonomy, as advanced, for example, in his book, Political Expectation. Indeed, readers of the latter book who are familiar with Kant's argument may have the impression that Tillich is fleshing out the viability of the very politico-religious ideal that Kant proposed.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> For a detailed analysis and defense of the unique and widely neglected argument for God's existence that Kant presents in *Religion*, pp.96-98; see Palmquist, 2015.

<sup>2.</sup> As such, I argue in Palmquist 2017 that Kant's theory of the church is essentially theocratic, with the proviso that typical forms of theocracy are coercive, whereas Kantian theocracy is non-coercive. For a detailed defense of such genuine (i.e., non-coercive) theocracy as a legitimate approach to religion in general, see Palmquist, 1993.

<sup>3.</sup> Tillich 1983/1971, pp. 18-22, begins his discussion of "Protestantism as a Creative and Formative Principle" (18) by explicitly comparing "Protestantism" with "Kantianism" (19): whereas the former employs a "prophetic criticism" that acknowledges a transcendent reality that makes itself known in the form of concrete symbols, Tillich (following Ritschl) portrays Kantian criticism as a totally abstract form of criticism that ultimately eschews anything concrete. For a summary of Tillich's theory of theonomy and a defense of the claim that it is fundamentally theocratic (in the authentic,

Finally, Kant's focus on God's justice, whenever he discusses the nature and possible manifestations of grace, has caused many readers to think that Kant denies the need for any divine assistance whatsoever. In my view, however, nothing could be further from the truth. Kant's point, rather, is that grace, which is essentially a gift of love on God's behalf, lacks efficacy if it is not given in the context of justice. Moreover, in the Second Piece of Religion, Kant portrays the human situation as leaving us in need of grace precisely because of our lack of moral power – what Kant repeatedly calls human "weakness" (see *Religion*, pp. 29, 43, 59n, 103, 141). This line of comparison, as far as I am aware, has never previously been noted by interpreters of Tillich; fleshing it out in detail would, therefore, require a separate article focusing on this theme alone. For now, let it suffice to say that Tillich employs this very same triad of concepts in his masterful treatment of the same problem, entitled Love, Power, and Justice, and in each case portrays the three main concepts in ways that are compatible with Kant's portrayals – though demonstrating such compatibility is beyond the scope of the present article.

With the foregoing seven points in mind, I shall attempt in the remainder of this article to answer the following set of interrelated questions, suggested by the title. Did Tillich adequately acknowledge the influence of Kant on his own thought? Or was he in some sense unaware of it, perhaps not realizing how much of his openly acknowledged admiration for Schelling was actually rooted in Schelling's debt to Kant? Or, perhaps, was Tillich aware of even this indirect influence but seeking to hide it for some reason? A full defense of the claim that some such form of debt was indeed hidden would require a book-length work. However, a quick overview of the references Tillich makes to Kant in his main books should enable us to make some initial suggestions as to what range of answers is possible.

In a 1960 lecture entitled "Philosophical Background of my Theology", Tillich refers to Schelling as "my friend and teacher" (Tillich, 1989, p. 420). The same lecture devotes most of one paragraph to Kant, lumping him together with Aristotle as the two philosophers who provided the West in general with essential "philosophical tools" (p. 416), and who provided Tillich in particular with "philosophical discipline". He then concisely admits that he took on board two claims from Kant: first, the epistemological theory of "the relationship of subject to object" (i.e., Kant's Copernican hypothesis); and second, his "understanding that the human mind is limited

non-coercive sense; cf. previous footnote), see Palmquist, 1993, especially pp. 59-65. I also provide further details on Tillich's position in *Political Expectation* later in the main text of this article.

<sup>1.</sup> For one of the many aspects of Schelling's debt to Kant, see Vanden Auweele, 2019.

to the categories of time and space, of causality and substance, of quantity and quality, and cannot go beyond these boundary lines in its own power." He admits that these two influences "contributed to my understanding of existentialism" (p. 416), but ends his lecture by insisting (p. 420) that his theology "is not dependent on...Kant as many Protestants are."

In line with this disclaimer, although many of Tillich's books refer to Kant, they rarely include more than a brief mention (often entailing a misconstrual [see e.g., previous footnote]) of some specific aspect of his philosophy. For example, in Systematic Theology Tillich never discusses Kant's philosophy in any significant detail, but does mention Kant 12 times in volume one (including three passing references to "Kantian(ism)" [pp. 6, 166n], which he takes to assume "[t]he duality ... between nature and freedom" [p. 232]), twice in volume two, and 17 times in volume three (including nine references to "Kantian(ism)" – most of these being merely passing references).<sup>2</sup> Each mention is brief and can be adequately summarized as claiming that, for Kant: "epistemology precedes ontology" (vol. I, p. 71), reason is finite and thus the purpose of the three *Critiques* is to describe our "critical ignorance" (vol. I, pp. 81-2),<sup>3</sup> the categorical imperative is assumed to be empty and formal (vol. I, p. 89),4 our incessant questioning about the causes of things cannot be stopped

<sup>1.</sup> Technically, of course, space and time are not categories for Kant, but pure intuitions. This is a typical example of Tillich's tendency (mentioned below) to misconstrue Kant's theories. However, in a similar passage in Systematic Theology (vol. I, p. 166n), Tillich does openly acknowledge that he is using the term "category" in a broader sense than Kant does.

<sup>2.</sup> Other texts with only passing references to Kant include a lecture Tillich gave in 1963, in which he refers to "the self-restriction of the Kantian philosophy" (Tillich, 1996, p. 7).

<sup>3.</sup> A footnote to this passage (Tillich, 1951, vol. I, p. 82n) offers one of Tillich's rare clarifications that Kant should not be interpreted (and hence rejected) "only as an epistemological idealist and ethical formalist.... Kant is more than this." Tillich then gives a one-sentence summary of each Critique, each sentence suggesting (though not explicitly stating) that the three Critiques were a significant inspiration for Tillich's own theology. Later, Tillich similarly praises "Kant's co-ordination of the moral law with the starry heavens as expressions of the unconditionally sublime" (vol. I, p. 119). Unfortunately, in other contexts, Tillich seems to forget (or hide?) his own admiration for the Critical system. For example, Tillich, 1972, portrays Kant as if he wrote only the first two Critiques (p. 326), "and the neo-Kantian school added the aesthetic reason as a third, uniting the practical and the theoretical." However, Tillich later (pp. 378-379) offers a clear account of Kant's own view of "the beautiful", as providing a synthesis of these two realms, and aptly acknowledges the consequent influence of Kant on the Romanticism that followed directly in the wake of the third Critique (see also pp. 384, 423).

<sup>4.</sup> This is the aspect of Kant's philosophy against which Tillich argues most consistently (and harshly). Tillich claims that, in fact, the "absolute" moral "demand" always arises in a "concrete" situation, and Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative are no exception (Tillich 1951, vol. I, p. 104). For Tillich, this awareness of the necessary interplay between the absolute and the concrete is the key to understanding what he calls "revelation" (vol. I, p. 89). What is subject to debate is whether Tillich is rejecting Kant's own ethics or Hegel's highly formalistic caricature of it. Thus, Tillich laments "that those in the Kant-Ritschl line...in theology" have tended to downplay the importance of "mysticism" as a "corrective" to "the final revelation" (vol. I, p. 140). On the possibility of interpreting Kant's philosophy as itself a form of (Critical) mysticism, just as Tillich sees the proper role of theology as both critical and mystical, see Palmquist, 2019.

merely by thinking of God as a final cause (vol. I, p. 196), a moral argument for God's existence shows "the presence of something unconditional within the self and the world" (vol. I, p. 206), mathematics is a result of good luck (vol. II, p. 27), "the myth of the Fall of transcendent souls" has a humanistic meaning (vol. II, p. 37), the soul is non-substantial (III, p. 24), "the pure formalism of ethics" is not fully realizable (vol. III, p. 46), philosophy valiantly attempts (but fails) "to liberate the ethical norm from all concrete contents" (vol. III, p. 47), morality is "autonomous" from "religious commandments" (vol. III, p. 158), and time and space need to be treated "interdependently" (vol. III, p. 315). As such, Kant is one of three "predominantly essentialist philosophers" (vol. III, p. 203), yet was also one of three key "philosophical critics of metaphysical psychology" (vol. III, p. 411). Moreover, he understood "the question of the finite or infinite character of time and space" (vol. III, p. 317), for "the stringency of Kant's solution of the antinomies" suggests that "[i]nfinity is a demand, not a thing" [vol. I, p. 190].

Several of Tillich's other books have similarly scattered references to Kant. The Protestant Era has two citations: one a passing reference (Tillich, 1957b, p. 10), the other a brief mention of Kant's "abstract-formalistic" theory of conscience (p. 143). The only passage in Tillich's The Religious Situation that refers to Kant (Tillich 1956, pp. 71-74) is a sweeping generalization about his "critical method" being based on "the dominance of pure rational form" (p. 71), although he admits that Kant's own (especially later) writings exhibit "a tendency to transcend the critical Kant" (p. 71), thus giving rise to the whole tradition of German idealism. Likewise, Political Expectation, other than briefly praising Kant's Enlightenment commitment to autonomy (Tillich, 1983/1971, p. 70), refers to Kant only in a lengthy passage that discusses "Kantian criticism" as understood by Ritschl (pp. 19-22; see note 1 on p. 81, above); there Tillich quite inaccurately accuses Kant of being "allied...with theory against practice" (p. 19) and describes "Kantianism" as "the ideal of an abstract society which dissolves all concrete forms", alleging that "there is really no more impotent form of criticism than Kantian criticism" (p. 19). With a similar degree of empty rhetorical dismissal, Tillich shows a serious misunderstanding of Kant's iudicial standpoint when in The Courage To Be he accuses Kant of ignoring "the bridge" that enables ethical and ontological concerns to be united

<sup>1.</sup> Tillich goes on to argue (1951, vol. I, p. 207) that, both for Augustine and Kant, "the starting point is right, but the conclusion is wrong. The experience of an unconditional element in man's encounter with reality is used for the establishment of an unconditional being (a contradiction in terms) within reality." But this objection, at least as applied to Kant, is grossly unfair, for Kant explicitly states that "God" must be regarded as a regulative idea and that the moral argument for God's existence holds only for our practical reason; theoretically (i.e., as far as the realm of being is concerned—which is the focus of Tillich's objection), God's existence retains a merely regulative status.

(Tillich, 1952, p. 3); ironically, aside from passing references to his "categorical [sic] forms" (p. 33) and his theories of human finitude and radical evil (p. 133), Tillich's only other mention of Kant in this book is a brief nod to his theory of genius (p. 105) – which shows that Tillich was familiar even with the third *Critique*, despite his neglect of its all-important bridging function!1

The evidence provided by this overview of relevant passages leads me to offer two tentative observations in answer to the foregoing set of questions. First, Tillich refers to Kant often enough to confirm without reasonable doubt that he was very familiar with Kant's philosophy: he at least thought he understood Kant, so the claim that Tillich may have been directly influenced by Kant is surely plausible; indeed, despite his above-quoted disclaimer, Tillich could hardly avoid admitting such influence to at least a limited degree.<sup>2</sup> After all, what influential philosopher or theologian of the twentieth-century was not influenced by Kant?

Second, the possibility that Tillich was not just influenced by Kant but that he may have also been indebted in certain ways that he was either unaware of or perhaps sought to hide also has some plausibility – but only in a qualified sense. For in two books, both published posthumously, Tillich examines Kant's philosophy in great detail. Large portions of his second doctoral dissertation, Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling's *Philosophical Development*, present a detailed discussion of Kant's philosophy; indeed, Kant features on roughly one-fourth of the pages. But Tillich's explicit aim in these sections is to show how Kant's philosophy is *lacking* in various respects that Schelling corrects. Most notably, the early Tillich's Kant is entirely formalistic and has absolutely no interest in mysticism and religious experience as such (but see Palmquist, 2019). The Kant that emerges from these pages is very much the Kant of (i.e., as reinterpreted by) the German idealists – not surprisingly, given that theologians in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century knew of no other Kant than this one.3

<sup>1.</sup> I have been unable to find any references to Kant in Tillich's more popular books, such as: *Dynamics* of Faith; Love, Power, and Justice; The Shaking of the Foundations; The New Being; and The Eternal Now. Even the course notes published as Tillich, 2016, make only one passing reference, to "Kantianism", described as: "Appearance is the given product of the interrelationship between the thing in itself and the Ego in itself, both of which are unknown" (31, strikethrough in original).

<sup>2.</sup> For the main evidence of clear influence, see the next two works discussed below in the main text, where Tillich discusses Kant's philosophy in great detail.

<sup>3.</sup> Thus, the masterful study of post-Kantian theology in Dorrien, 2012, concludes that the legacy of Kant that has traversed this liberal-idealist path has reached a dead-end in the early twenty-first century. However, as I point out in my review of his book (see Palmquist, 2014), Dorrien shows no awareness of the new, affirmative interpretations of Kant's theology and philosophy of religion that have emerged in the past three decades. For an overview of the various types of affirmative

The second great exception to Tillich's tendency to engage with Kant only through a series of glosses is his monumental (but again, posthumously published) book, A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism. On nearly 10% of its 541 pages, the lectures transcribed in Tillich 1972 discuss Kant's philosophy, sometimes in considerable depth, referring to Kant repeatedly and in far too much detail for me to provide an adequate account here. Instead, I shall offer only a few key highlights. Part I (see previous footnote) refers to Kant in seven passages, spanning nine pages. After identifying Kant's "moral law" or "practical reason" with the Christian "Logos" (p. 8), his remaining mentions in Part I refer only in passing to Kant's rejection of the ontological argument (pp. 164-5, 194), to Abelard as prefiguring Kant's ethics in general and especially the claim that "nothing is good except a goodwill" (p. 171), to Kant's understanding of "nature" as "a realm in which physical law is valid" being "much more Calvinistic and Zwinglian" than Lutheran (p. 259), to the opening lines of Kant's What Is Enlightenment? essay, which Tillich endorses (pp. 288-9), and (without further explanation or critical qualifications) to "Kant's division of the world of knowledge from the world of values" (p. 292). Part II covers Kant's philosophy in far too much detail to summarize adequately, but because it aims to be primarily a history, a general overview of the topics covered will suffice for our present purposes. Four sections of Part II deal primarily with Kant: these are entitled "The Kantian Definition of Autonomy" (pp. 320-2f), "Kant, Moral Religion, and Radical Evil" (360-6), "The Synthesis of Spinoza and Kant" (pp. 370-1), and "The 'Back to Kant' Movement" (p. 511-3f). Skipping over Tillich's many passing mentions of Kant, most of which refer to Kant's relation to other philosophers, I shall conclude this overview by noting that, in a section called "The Attitude of the Enlightened Man" (pp. 341f), where Kant remains mostly unnamed but seems to be the primary model, Tillich refers at one point (p. 344) to Kant's theory of grace in Religion, which he believes Kant rejects as heteronomous, adding: "In this reasonable religion prayer was also removed, because prayer relates one to that which transcends oneself." As I have argued elsewhere (see especially Palmquist, 2010 and 1997), however, current affirmative interpreters of Kant recognize that

interpretations that have developed since 1970, see Firestone and Palmquist 2006; in Palmquist, 2012, I assess the extent to which many of these approaches are genuinely affirmative.

<sup>1.</sup> This book (Tillich, 1972) originally appeared as two separate monographs: Part I was initially entitled A History of Christian Thought (1967), and Part II, Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Protestant Theology (1968). The latter includes 43 of the 52 pages listed in the Index of Tillich, 1972 as referring to Kant. Because both parts of the book are based on lectures and were not approved for publication by Tillich himself, I will only briefly summarize this text's extensive coverage of Kant's philosophy.

Religion offers us a way to be religious that is far closer to the (quasimystical) ideal that Tillich himself promoted. (See Tillich, 1972, p. 455 for a similarly extreme and inaccurate account of Kant's view of miracles.) Explicitly reading Kant through the eyes of Fichte, Tillich says that for Kant (p. 442): "Religion is only an appendix to the moral imperative." Tillich remained unaware of the fact that Kant himself eschewed this reading of his religious views, for (as I have argued in Palmquist, 2016) Kant offered at least as much credence to the more theologically affirmative interpretation promoted by Gottlob Christian Storr.

What Tillich did not (and could not) see is that Kant scholars nowadays (cf. note 1 on the previous page) are beginning to see a Kant who was *not* the Kant of Fichte, Schelling, and the liberal theological tradition of German idealism:1 this new interpretation reads Kant whole, recognizing that he was not the arch-formalist that nearly two centuries of interpreters, following Hegel's<sup>2</sup> caricature, took him to be. Perhaps when Tillich read the works of the Kant he was taught, he picked up themes that were there in the Kant that affirmative interpreters are now highlighting, but that had not been developed by that tradition. If so, then Tillich's theology can be regarded as one of the great theological affirmations of Kant's philosophy of religion. On the other hand, if I am correct that the most significant of the religious ideas that I have come to associate with Kant are *all* present in Tillich, then this does suggest one other possibility that I have not yet considered. And this final question I must pose to myself: Could it be that my own reading of Kant, and the whole "affirmative school" of Kant interpretation that I have sought to promote for the past 30 years (see e.g., Palmquist, 1989), is a misreading that has come about as a result of imposing my prior knowledge and admiration of Tillich's theology onto Kant's texts? Answering this question may require another 30 years of research!3

<sup>1.</sup> Boss, 2017, has convincingly argued that the most accurate reading of Tillich's own view of Kant is that he read Kant through the lens provided mainly by Fichte, but also by Schelling and Hegel. Boss opposes the claims of both Perrottet, 2012, that Tillich was mainly interested in the first Critique, and interpreters such as Davidovich, 1993, and Love, 2012, that Tillich was mainly interested in the third Critique. My argument in this article tends to support Boss' position as an accurate reading of Tillich, but, recognizes that the views espoused by Davidovich and Love represent the way Tillich should have viewed Kant-what I am here calling Tillich's hidden debt to Kant.

<sup>2.</sup> ncidentally, Tillich, 1972, assesses Kant as being "a more profound thinker" than Hegel, even though Hegel "created an epoch in the history of philosophy" more successfully than Kant did (p. 413).

<sup>3.</sup> An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference, "Ultimate Concern: Paul Tillich, Buddhism, Confucianism", held on 12-13 July 2015 at Hong Kong Baptist University. My thanks to the participants of that event for helpful feedback during the discussion that followed my presentation.

## References

- Boss, M. (2017). Chapter 1. Which Kant? Whose Idealism? Paul Tillich's Philosophical Training Reappraised. In S. A. Shearn & R. R. Manning (Eds.), Returning to Tillich: Theology and Legacy in Transition (pp. 13-30). De Gruyter.
- Clayton, P. (2014). Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014). Theoblogy (September 7). Retrieved September 27, 2019, from: https://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2014/09/07/wolfhart-pannenberg-1928-2014/-
- Davidovich, A. (1993). Religion as a Province of Meaning the Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology. Fortress Press.
- Dorrien, G. (2012). Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology (1st edition). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Firestone, C. L. (2009). Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason. Ashgate.
- Firestone, C. L., & Palmquist, S. R. (2006). Editors' Introduction. In C. L. Firestone & S. R. Palmquist (Eds.), Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion. Indiana University Press (pp.1-39).
- Kant, I. (1793/1794). Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason (W. S. Pluhar & S. R. Palmquist, Trans.). In S. R. Palmquist, Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Love, B. (2010). Kant's Religious Perspective on the Human Person. In S. R. Palmquist (Ed.), Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy, (pp. 563-72). De Gruyter. doi:10.1515/9783110226249.3.563
- Love, B. (2012). Tillich on Eros and Logos and the Beauty of Kant. North American Paul Tillich Society Bulletin, 38.4, 10-14.
- Palmquist, S. R. (1984). Faith as Kant's Key to the Justification of Transcendental Reflection. Heythrop Journal, 25(4), 442-55. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2265.1984.tb00558.x<sup>-</sup>
- Palmquist, S. R. (1989). Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher? Faith and *Philosophy*, 6(1), 65-75. doi: 10.5840/faithphil1989619
- Palmquist, S. R. (1993). Biblical Theocracy: A vision of the biblical foundations for a Christian political philosophy Philopsychy Press.

- Palmquist, S. R. (1997). Kant's Critical Hermeneutic of Prayer. The Journal of Religion, 77(4), 584-604. doi: 10.1086/490067
- Palmquist, S. R. (2000a). Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives. Ashgate.
- Palmquist, S. R. (2000b). Philosophy of Religion after Kant and Kierkegaard. In D. Z. Phillips & T. Tessin (Eds.), Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion (pp. 245-62). Macmillan. doi: 10.1007/978-1-349-62906-0\_11
- Palmquist, S. R. (2009). Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God: The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance. Faith and Philosophy, 26(1), 3-22. doi: faithphil20092611
- Palmquist, S. R. (2010). Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance. The Journal of Religion, 90(4), 530-53. doi: 10.1086/654821
- Palmquist, S. R. (2012). To Tell the Truth on Kant and Christianity: Will the Real Affirmative Interpreter Please Stand Up! Faith and Philosophy, 29(3), 340-46. doi: faithphil201229334
- Palmquist, S. R. (2014). Gary Dorrien, Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology. The Journal of Religion, 94(2), 263-65. doi: 10.1086/676615
- Palmquist, S. R. (2015). Kant's Prudential Theory of Religion: The Necessity of Historical Faith for Moral Empowerment. Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal Philosophy. *I*(1). 57-76. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.18505
- Palmquist, S. R. (2016). Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Palmquist, S. R. (2017). Kant's Model for Building the True Church: Transcending "Might Makes Right" and "Should Makes Good" through the Idea of a Non-Coercive Theocracy. Diametros, (54), 76-94. doi: 10.13153/diam.54.2017.1134
- Palmquist, S. R. (2019). Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light. Lexington Books.
- Perottet, C. (2012). Au-delà du criticisme kantien: La méthode critique-intuitive dans la première philosophie de la religion de Paul Tillich. Presses de

#### l'Université Laval.

- Tillich, P. (1919). What Is Religion? (Trans. J. L. Adams, 1969. Harper & Row.) Selections reprinted in Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries (M. K. Taylor, Ed.), pp. 35-66. Fortress Press.
- Tillich, P. (1951/1957a/1963). Systematic Theology, three volumes. University of Chicago Press.
- Tillich, P. (1952). The Courage To Be. Yale University Press.
- Tillich, P. (1956). The Religious Situation. Meridian.
- Tillich, P. (1957b). *The Protestant Era*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tillich, P. (1958/1957c). Dynamics of Faith. Harper.
- Tillich, P. (1966). The Future of Religions (J. C. Brauer, Ed.). Harper & Row. Selections reprinted in Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries (M. K. Taylor, Ed.), pp. 312-23. Fortress Press.
- Tillich, P. (1972). A History of Christian Thought From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism (C. E. Braaten, Ed.). Simon and Schuster.
- Tillich, P. (1974). Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling's Philosophical Development (C. McKnight, Ed.). Bucknell University Press.
- Tillich, P. (1983/1971). Political Expectation. University Press of America.
- Tillich, P. (1989). Philosophical Background of my Theology. Chapter 11 in Tillich, P. *Philosophical Writings* (G. Wenz, Ed.), pp. 411-20. De Gruyter.
- Tillich, P. (1996). [The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message] (D. Foster, Ed.). Wipf and Stock.
- Tillich, P. (2016). Advanced Problems in Systematic Theology: Courses at Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1936-1938 (E. Sturm, Ed.). Vol. XIX in Ergānzungs- und Nachlassbānde zu den gesammelten Werke von Paul Tillich. De Gruyter.
- Vanden Auweele, D. (2019). Kant and Schelling on the Ground of Evil. International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 85(2), 235-253. doi: 10.1007/s11153-019-09701-6.

# Beyond Combination: How Cosmic Consciousness Grounds Ordinary Experience

'Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Always our being is descending into us from we know not whence'.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Over-Soul'

ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is twofold. First, our purpose is to propose and motivate a novel and scientifically informed variant of cosmopsychism, namely, the view that the experiences of ordinary subjects are ultimately grounded in an all-pervading cosmic consciousness. Second, we will demonstrate that this approach generates promising avenues for addressing familiar problems of phenomenal constitution. We use stochastic electrodynamics (SED) as the physical bedrock of our approach, supplementing it with key insights about the nature of consciousness long emphasized in eastern philosophy and other wisdom traditions. We proceed to show that our approach substantiates an intriguing way of thinking about the dynamical emergence of ordinary consciousness from cosmic consciousness, identifying the latter with the vacuum state of quantum field theory. Finally, we argue that the present approach is well suited to address problems of phenomenal constitution, in particular as they pertain to the qualities and structure of experience and to the generation of subjects.

KEYWORDS: combination problem, cosmopsychism, panpsychism, stochastic electrodynamics, zero-point field, quantum coherence

#### Introduction

The last three decades witnessed a surge of interest in consciousness as a scientific and philosophical problem of the first rank. Correlated with this trend is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with standard materialist approaches to the mind-body problem: in particular with the explanatory gap associated with the notion that phenomenal consciousness is a cosmic latecomer emerging from an

Itay Shani would like to thank the audience at the *Idealism and the Mind-Body Problem* workshop (NYU Shanghai, June 2017) for stimulating feedback that contributed to the motive force behind the present paper. Thanks are also due to Miri Albahari for many prolific discussions. Both IS and JK thank an anonymous referee for this journal for providing us with insightful comments.

antecedent background of insensate physical stuff. Complementary to this latter sentiment is the revival of the idea that consciousness is ontologically fundamental, that is, an irreducible feature of ultimate reality or perhaps even the very essence of ultimate reality itself.

One approach that holds consciousness to be ontologically basic and enjoys growing popularity among scientists and philosophers who are critical of orthodox materialism is *panpsychism*. The distinctive markers of panpsychism can be thought of along two orthogonal dimensions: one horizontal, the other vertical. Horizontally, there is the idea that consciousness is immanent throughout nature, namely, that all concrete things are, in one way or another, infused with the dwelling presence of consciousness (hence the 'pan' in panpsychism). Vertically, there is the assumption that consciousness goes 'all the way down', which is to say that even prebiotic microscopic entities—no matter how small or simple—are endowed with a modicum of experiential life.

It is important, however, to avoid certain misconceptions regarding panpsychism. One prevalent misinterpretation is that panpsychism implies that *all* things are conscious. This, however, does not follow, for both the horizontal and the vertical dimension of panpsychism are entirely consistent with the notion that many macro-scale objects (rocks and chairs are typical examples) are *inanimate*, containing microscopic pockets of consciousness in their midst but lacking a unified consciousness extending across their full scale. Another misapprehension consists in the assumption that panpsychism is exhausted by *micropsychism*, the view that all conscious experiences are ultimately grounded in micro-level conscious experience. Again, there is nothing in the immanence hypothesis or even in the idea that consciousness goes all the way down to exclude the converse doctrine of *cosmopsychism*, according to which the ultimate ground of creaturely conscious experience is a cosmic-level consciousness.

In the early days of the revived interest in panpsychism, around the turn of the millennium, proponents and opponents alike were almost exclusively interested in atomistic or thing-pluralist variants of the doctrine, namely, in theories whose basic metaphysical assumptions reflect the reductionist bottom-up approach of orthodox materialism, with the important qualification that the elementary building blocks of nature (which were typically identified with subatomic particles) are considered to be endowed with rudimentary flashes of experience (see Chalmers 1996; Seager 1995; Strawson 2006). More sophisticated manifestations of consciousness were presumed to result from one or another kind of combinatory integration—a mental chemistry, so to speak (see Coleman 2012; Goff 2006).

Following others, we call this brand of panpsychism *micropsychism*. The term is due to Strawson (2006) who uses it to denote a position that is somewhat weaker than panpsychism since it requires only that *some* microscopic ultimates are experience involving. Others, however, use 'micropsychism' as a label for atomistic panpsychism (see Chalmers, forthcoming; Goff, forthcoming). We find the latter use intuitive and will follow it henceforth.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A more recent exposition of Strawson's view suggests that it is consistent with a quantum-field-based type of cosmopsychism (see Strawson, forthcoming).

More recently, however, there is a growing interest in a holistic, thing-monist, alternative that came to be known as *cosmopsychism* (see, for example, Jaskolla and Buck 2012; Goff 2017; Mathews 2011; Nagasawa and Wager 2017; Shani 2015). On this latter view it is the cosmos as whole, rather than its tiniest bits and pieces, that is presumed to be ontologically fundamental and the ultimate ground of macro-level consciousness. As such, the assumption is that there is a cosmic level of consciousness, and that it is this cosmic consciousness (rather than microscopic forms of consciousness) that serves as the ultimate bedrock substantiating the experiential lives of creatures like us.<sup>2</sup>

A major trigger for the rise of interest in cosmopsychism is the hope that a holistic, top-down, substantiation of macro-level experience will prove a more viable option than an atomistic, bottom-up constitution. Micropsychism experiences serious difficulties in facing the *combination problem*, and advocates of cosmopsychism belong with those who suspect that a sound solution requires a radical shift in perspective (but see Dainton [2011], Miller [2018], and Roelofs [2015] for recent attempts to address the combination problem from a micropsychist perspective).

In essence, the combination problem (Seager 1995) consists in the task of explaining how macro-level phenomenal consciousness—the ongoing flow of subjective experience with which we are personally acquainted and which we ascribe with confidence to other people and animals around us—results from the combination of fundamental micro-level experiences. Put differently and in broader terms, the challenge is to explain how fundamental micro-consciousness *substantiates* familiar macro-consciousness. It is generally agreed that the combination problem is the most pressing theoretical challenge facing panpsychism at the present and that the future of the panpsychist platform depends crucially on the ability to address this challenge.

However, it is by no means obvious that a cosmopsychist framework can deliver us from the difficulties of mental combination. In particular, since it appears that cosmopsychism is vulnerable to a *decombination* problem that mirrors the combination problem faced by micropsychism. For if macro-consciousness is grounded in cosmic consciousness, does this not require the assumption that macro-level experiences are dissected from cosmic level experiences in a process that reverses micropsychist combination? Why should top-down (or cosmic-macro) constitution be less problematic than bottom-up (micro-macro) constitution? Is not the very idea of mental constitution afflicted with insurmountable obstacles, from whichever angle it is approached? This is a serious and fair concern that cosmopsychists cannot ignore.

While it is not our goal to disprove micropsychism, we hold the opinion that the cosmopsychist framework presented below carries a potential for moving the discussion forward or, at the very least, for pointing in a promising direction. We have both defended a cosmopsychist approach to consciousness in the past—one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Apart from micropsychism and cosmopsychism, there is also a body of work that falls under the banner of *emergentive* panpsychism (see Brüntrup 2017; Mørch 2014; Rosenberg 2004; Seager 2017). Although marked with holistic overtones, emergentive panpsychism does not imply the reality of cosmic consciousness, thereby constituting a third alternative. While we recognize the significance of this line of research, we shall not discuss it any further here.

of us from a philosophical standpoint (Shani 2015), the other from the standpoint of modern physics (Keppler 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018). In the present paper we argue that a combined approach that integrates both lines of work yields the resources for addressing some of the major difficulties associated with cosmic-macro constitution and the decombination problem.

In the next section we comment on some of the major combination and decombination problems discussed and debated in the philosophical literature. This will serve to clarify the terrain and to highlight the explanatory challenges faced by cosmopsychism with regard to mental constitution. It will also set up the problem space we target in later sections. In section 2 we introduce stochastic electrodynamics (SED), a nonstandard approach to quantum theory and fundamental physical reality, as the conceptual framework that will serve as the physical basis of our approach. In section 3 we show how this conceptual framework sustains an explanation of the emergence of ordinary experience against the background of an all-pervading field of cosmic consciousness. In section 4 we return to issues of mental combination, showing how an SED-based cosmopsychism opens up a promising avenue for solving a variety of constitution problems pertaining to the structure, and the qualities, of subjective experience. In section 5, we tackle the subject combination problem, arguably the most formidable of all problems of mental constitution. Finally, in section 6 we address some additional questions pertaining both to the conceptual soundness of our proposal and to issues of philosophical import that go beyond the scope of the present paper.

## Micropsychism, Cosmopsychism, and the Challenge of Phenomenal Constitution

As mentioned above, the most formidable challenge facing panpsychism is to explain the constitutive dependency of familiar macro-level consciousness upon fundamental consciousness. If panpsychists are right in their contention that in order to reintegrate consciousness in nature we must evoke the hypothesis that experience is elemental, then this hypothesis ought to prove itself explanatorily potent: in one way or another, primordial consciousness must ground the reality of evolved sophisticated phenomenologies. Yet, as William James ([1890] 1950: vol. 1, chap. 5) famously argued, it is difficult to conceive how one conscious mind may derive its existence, *qua* conscious mind, from another (or from a plurality of such minds). Each conscious mind, says James, is phenomenally self-contained, and this runs counter to the assumption of subjective overlap involved in the notion that the phenomenal life of any macro-level subject is literally composed of (or decomposed from) the phenomenal lives of other, more basic subjects.

One intuitive and prima facie attractive way of explaining the ontological dependency of macro-level consciousness upon fundamental consciousness is by reference to *compositional* constitution. On this view, experiences as well as conscious selves enter into relations of *cross-level inclusion*: they are literally composed of or fractured from other experiences and selves (microscopic or cosmic, as the case may be). Yet, the idea that experiences or experiencing selves

enter into strict relations of combinatory inclusion breeds considerable difficulties. In the first place, in the spirit of James's critique, it is open to the objection that nothing seems to *necessitate* the formation of novel experiences or experiencing selves from compositional (or decompositional) operations upon preexistent experiences or selves. In the absence of such necessitation or entailment, the postulation of consciousness at the basis of things fails to guarantee the reality of macro-level consciousness—giving rise to an explanatory gap that appears analogous to the one afflicting orthodox materialism.3 Second, and worse still, there is the more radical contention that such putative inclusion relations are not merely explanatorily deficient or inconclusive, but altogether incoherent. Each conscious perspective, so goes the idea, is strictly exclusive of all others; hence, none can include or be included in another. Consequently, the price of insisting on interperspectival combination is exacted in the form of loss of mental coherence. (The subtleties of this question cannot be explored in full here; for more detailed discussions see Albahari [forthcoming]; Basile [2010]; Coleman [2014]; and Shani [2015]). The struggle to make good sense of phenomenal inclusion, and more generally of any relation of phenomenal grounding, is what gives the combination problem its bite.4

Let us now delineate in broad brush strokes the troubled territory of the combination problem in its various derivatives. For the sake of orderly exposition we shall focus first on a few conspicuous variants of the combination problem as they appear in the context of micropsychism before pointing to their presumed analogs within the problem space of cosmopsychism.

As mentioned earlier, the 'combination problem' is actually a genus term designating a family of related problems. Chalmers (2017) argues that the combination problem (CP) can be broken down into three major subcategories (there are other problems, known in the literature, that do not fit neatly into this tripartite classification, but we will not elaborate on them here):

- (1) The subject CP: How do micro-subjects combine to yield a macro-subject?
- (2) The quality CP: How do micro-qualities combine to yield macro-qualities?
- (3) The structure CP: How do microexperiential structures combine to yield macroexperiential structures?

Given the assumptions of compositional constitution and cross-level inclusion, the combination problem can be plotted against any of these three different axes. Consider first the *subject* CP, which many believe to be the most formidable of all combination problems (see, e.g., Coleman 2014; Miller 2018). Here the challenge

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Argumentation along this line often parallels familiar arguments directed against orthodox materialism: in particular in the form of conceivability arguments (see Chalmers 2017; Goff 2009), or knowledge arguments (Chalmers 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Interestingly, James's original statement of the problem (1890: 162) can be interpreted as lending support to either of the two challenges discussed above: lack of necessitation and straightforward impossibility.

is twofold. First, to explain why any collection of subjects, however arranged, should ever give rise to a higher, inclusive subject. Second, to demonstrate that the very idea of subjective inclusion—according to which macro-level conscious perspectives are literally constituted of myriads of copresent micro-perspectives—is coherent, involving no logical contradictions or epistemic absurdities (see above).

Moving to the *quality* CP, the challenge here is to explain how the phenomenal richness of the world we know could possibly be accounted for in terms of the putatively austere phenomenal qualities manifested by, say, subatomic particles. The problem is particularly acute given a 'Russellian' panpsychist picture, according to which all basal phenomenal properties are realizers of (functionally characterized) primitive physical properties (see Chalmers 2015; Lockwood 1993; Smolin 2015). On such a picture, a meager palette of indistinct qualities is burdened with the task of combinatorially generating the splendorous and seemingly inexhaustible gamut of all possible experiences (this is the so-called *palette* problem, see Lockwood 1993).

Finally, the *structure* CP consists in the alleged mismatch between the contours of everyday experience and the phenomenal structure we would naturally expect to result from combinatorial operations over microscopic experiences. Paradoxically, it appears that the structure of daily experience is both too rich and too poor when compared with the presumed structure of its microexperiential base. On the one hand, it is hard to fathom how the primitive structural properties of microscopic experiences could account for the considerable spatiotemporal and multimodal complexity of macroscopic experience. On the other hand, macro-level phenomenology appears remarkably coarse-grained when compared with the putative grainy structure of collections of microexperiences (this is the so-called *grain* problem, see Lockwood 1993; Sellars 1965).

Are these problems translatable, *mutatis mutandis*, to cosmopsychism? Many believe they are (see Chalmers, forthcoming; Miller 2018). Of course, much depends on how we choose to characterize the cosmic consciousness that, on this view, substantiates all other experiencing beings (see sections 4 and 5 below). Nevertheless, it is easy to see how constitution problems analogous in form to those afflicting micropsychism can resurface in the context of cosmopsychism by (as it were) reversing the arrow of constitution.

A *structure* constitution problem arises when one considers how the structure of everyday experience might be grounded in the structure of cosmic experiences. This problem appears particularly pressing if one assumes that the cosmic consciousness at the basis of all things is phenomenally austere, namely, that its experiential landscape is barren and homogenous in comparison to the mental lives of evolved localized creatures like us (see Chalmers, forthcoming). The same assumption gives rise to a *quality* constitution problem: How can the qualitatively rich inner world of macro-subjects emerge from the meager phenomenal background afforded by cosmic consciousness? How can a barren cosmic landscape sustain multiple oases of experiential affluence in its midst?

However, as before, it appears that the hardest of all constitution problems pertains to the constitution of *subjects*. Analogously to the bottom-up formation of macro-subjects from micro-subjects, the top-down derivation of macro-subjects

from a cosmic subject faces the challenges of necessitation and intelligibility. Concerning the first challenge, the question is in what sense the postulation of a cosmic consciousness as the ground of all things helps explain (let alone necessitate) the manifest reality of evolved localized subjects. Concerning the second, the challenge is to show that the ontic dependency of macro-subjects upon an overarching cosmic consciousness can be delineated coherently, without incurring epistemic absurdity.

On the face of it, then, all the generic constitution problems afflicting micropsychism can be reformulated as applicable to cosmopsychism. Nonetheless, we surmise that the turn toward cosmopsychism is more than a formal reversal of the arrow of explanation. It reflects a profound shift in metaphysical outlook and, as such, it brings novel conceptual resources to bear on the problems at hand. In particular, we believe that a cosmopsychist platform informed, on the one hand, by contemporary physics and, on the other hand, by rather ancient metaphysical assumptions about the ultimate nature of cosmic consciousness, effects radical changes in our approach to questions of phenomenal constitution. In addition, it can prove itself instrumental in our ability to confront these questions successfully. The rest of the paper is an attempt to substantiate this claim.

## 2. SED as a Conceptual Foundation for Quantum Physics

The physical bedrock of our approach is SED, the foundations of which were laid some fifty years ago (Marshall 1963, 1965; Boyer 1969, 1975) and have been continuously advanced over the past decades (De la Peña-Auerbach and Cetto 1977; De la Peña and Cetto 1994, 1995, 2001, 2006; De la Peña et al. 2009, 2015). The primary goal of this theory consists in deriving the formalism of quantum mechanics and quantum electrodynamics (QED) from first principles. Crucially, SED is based on the conception that the universe is imbued with an all-pervasive electromagnetic background field, called zero-point field (ZPF). The undisturbed ZPF, which features unique properties, is a maximally disordered field, meaning that the field modes are completely uncorrelated among each other (De la Peña and Cetto 1994, 1995; De la Peña et al. 2009).

In principle, the background activity represented by the ZPF corresponds to the vacuum fluctuations of QED. Yet, there are significant differences. In the conventional interpretation of QED the vacuum field is viewed as an unpleasant ingredient of the theory that is degraded to a virtual field being solely responsible for small corrections on top of the quantum behavior of matter. By contrast, in the conceptual framework of SED the ZPF occupies center stage in that it is looked upon as the origin of the quantum behavior of matter (De la Peña et al. 2015); this framework is further elucidated below. Before we get into the details, it should be pointed out that the universal background activity is not only composed of an electromagnetic field, but also of fields that mediate other fundamental forces, such as the weak and strong interaction. However, we will ignore the latter fields since our main emphasis lies on the treatment of physical systems that are dominated by the electromagnetic interaction, something that applies particularly to living matter.

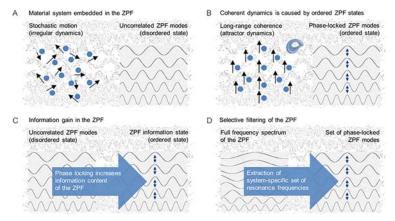


Figure 1. (A) Every material system can be regarded as an open system in permanent contact with the random ZPF. Due to their interaction with the initially uncorrelated field modes, the system components acquire a stochastic motion and behave as stochastic oscillators. (B) A system that is sufficiently shielded from disruptive thermal influences can reach a dynamically stable state (i.e., an attractor) that is orchestrated by the ZPF. As a consequence, the system *enters the quantum regime* and displays long-range coherence, which in turn results in a phase-locked coupling of the field modes that are involved in the maintenance of the attractor dynamics. (C) Since such a phase locking increases the information content of the ZPF, the modified ZPF state accompanying the formation of an attractor can be viewed as a ZPF *information state*. (D) Seen from a different perspective, a quantum system features the characteristics of a resonant oscillator that *extracts its system-specific set of resonance frequencies* selectively from the full frequency spectrum of the background field.

According to SED, the electrically charged components of every physical system interact unavoidably with the radiative background (see figure 1A), that is, every material system can be regarded as an open stochastic system in permanent contact with the random ZPF (De la Peña et al. 2015). As long as the interaction strength between the oscillating components and the relevant field modes, for which the system exhibits a strong resonant behavior, exceeds disturbing forces, such as thermal noise, the energy exchange between the system and the ZPF can reach equilibrium. In such a balance situation the ZPF takes control of the system and imposes restrictions on the dynamics of the system components that manifest themselves in quantization conditions in accordance with the stationary states predicted by quantum theory (De la Peña and Cetto 1995, 2001, 2006). In other words, a system in equilibrium with the ZPF falls into a dynamically stable state, that is, an attractor, and displays quantum behavior (De la Peña and Cetto 1995).

Due to the close interrelationship between material systems and the background field, the presence of matter also exerts influence on the internal structure and dynamics of the ZPF. This interplay induces a modification and partial organization of the local field in such a way that the relevant ZPF modes, which can be regarded as a system-specific set of resonance frequencies playing a dominant role in the maintenance of the balance situation, become *highly correlated* (De la Peña and Cetto 2006; De la Peña et al. 2009). In other words,

the orchestration of a dynamically stable system requires the initially chaotic ZPF to change over to a partially ordered state that shows a phase locking of the relevant field modes. As a result (see figure 1B), all the components of the system are effectively coupled through the ZPF, giving rise to collective cooperation and *long-range coherence* (De la Peña and Cetto 2001).

The causal relationships described above convey an idea of the fundamental mechanisms underlying quantum systems that can be interpreted with regard to both information gain in the ZPF and selective extraction of particular frequencies from the ZPF (Keppler 2012, 2013, 2016). From the first perspective (see figure 1C), the phase-locked ZPF modes that accompany the formation of an attractor represent a local ZPF information state that exhibits higher information content compared to the disordered initial state of the background field. Each attractor is characterized by its specific set of phase-locked field modes and, hence, by its unique ZPF *information state*. Seen from the second point of view (see figure 1D), a system in equilibrium with the ZPF behaves as a resonant stochastic oscillator that *extracts its resonance frequencies selectively from the full frequency spectrum of the background field*. These system-specific ZPF modes undergo a phase-locked coupling while all the other modes remain unaffected.

Bearing this universal mechanism of structure formation in mind, it becomes obvious that there is no clear separation between the microcosm and the macrocosm, so that quantum behavior should not be restricted to the lowest levels of matter. The key insight is that coherent structures come into existence through selective *filtering* of the omnipresent ZPF, in keeping with the guiding principle that the maintenance of the dynamic equilibrium in more complex material systems involves more complex ZPF information states. Correspondingly, quantum phenomena can be expected to appear in many macroscopic systems, particularly in living organisms, provided that they are sufficiently shielded from disruptive thermal influences (Del Giudice et al. 2005).

Beyond that, there is one more remarkable feature that can be attributed to the ZPF, namely, that not only the stability of matter, but also the putatively intrinsic properties of elementary particles, such as the quantized spin, turn out to be emergent phenomena arising from a deeper stochastic process involving the ZPF (De la Peña et al. 2009). This suggests that the ZPF can be seen as the root cause of the quantum behavior of matter and that all physical properties of matter can be understood as dynamically *acquired* properties resulting from the interaction with the background field.

In summary, SED paves a way for a deeper understanding and explanation of quantum phenomena and opens up new vistas that otherwise remain concealed behind the formalism of QED. In this way, it radically changes our notion of reality by giving significance to the ZPF as a creative agent that shapes matter and, due to its inherent stochasticity, constitutes the source of structural variety in the universe. In particular, the properties of any kind of quantum system can be traced back to the resonant interaction between the system components and the ZPF, which in turn modifies the background field and results in the formation of system-specific ZPF information states. In contrast, the components of classical systems are not dynamically coupled via the ZPF, thus leaving the ZPF completely

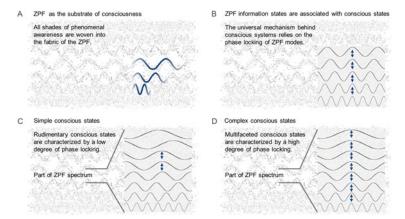


Figure 2. (A) The theoretical framework is based on the hypothesis that the all-pervasive ZPF is the carrier of consciousness, that is, all shades of phenomenal awareness are woven into the fabric of the ZPF. (B) Under this assumption, the principle of dynamical coupling of sets of ZPF modes is eminently suitable for the extraction of an enormous variety of shades of consciousness from the phenomenal color palette immanent in the ZPF. (C) The quantity of consciousness of a system is determined by the dynamically accessible part of the ZPF spectrum and the degree of phase locking the system is able to establish in this part. Simple conscious states are characterized by a low degree of phase locking. (D) In contrast, complex conscious states are characterized by a large number of phase-locked ZPF modes.

unaffected and rendering the system incapable of generating ZPF information states (Keppler 2016, 2018).

## 3. SED as a Theoretical Framework for Consciousness

The aforementioned features suggest that the ZPF is perfectly suited for playing the dual role as the carrier of both primordial energy and consciousness. Accordingly, we posit that all conceivable shades of phenomenal awareness are inherent in the frequency spectrum of the ZPF (see figure 2A). Due to its disordered ground state, the ZPF can therefore, from the external perspective, be regarded as a vibrant pool of activity, and from the internal perspective be looked upon as a formless sea of consciousness or unstructured ocean of awareness that carries an enormous range of potentially available phenomenal nuances. Proceeding from this postulate, the mechanism underlying quantum systems meets the requirements that are to be imposed on a truly fundamental mechanism behind conscious systems, leading us to the assumption that conscious systems extract their states of consciousness from the phenomenal color palette immanent in the ZPF (see figure 2B). These hypotheses express that every ZPF information state is associated with a conscious state or, put differently, that a pattern of phase-locked ZPF modes determines the physical as well as the phenomenal properties of a quantum system (Keppler 2013, 2016, 2018).

As a consequence, it can be expected that every quantum system is a conscious system, with the accessible spectrum of conscious states of a given system being

delimited by its dynamic variability, that is, by the variety of transiently stable attractors, and the quantity of consciousness of each state being determined by the degree of phase locking in the accessible part of the ZPF (see figures 2C and 2D). These inferences are valid unless there are plausible additional constraints for the domain of consciousness, which we do not see at the moment. While simple quantum systems, such as atoms and molecules, are probably equipped with a very rudimentary, limited, and monotonous form of consciousness, we may assume that complex quantum systems, such as coherently oscillating cell assemblies in living organisms, are endowed with a broad range of multifaceted conscious experiences.

At this point, it is important to recall that the phenomenal properties of quantum systems are not intrinsic properties, but dynamically acquired properties that can be attributed to the system over the lifetime of an attractor. In contrast to quantum systems, the dynamics of classical systems are completely independent of the ZPF, thus leaving the background field unaffected and preventing the generation of ZPF information states. This suggests that such systems are excluded from conscious awareness (Keppler 2013, 2016, 2018) or, expressed differently, that it is nomologically impossible for classical systems to be conscious.

From this mechanism we obtain a clear demarcation criterion between conscious and nonconscious systems in such a way that the formation of transiently stable attractors distinguishing themselves by a high degree of coherence is an essential prerequisite for conscious processes; this is supported by an extensive body of evidence from neuroscience (Desmedt and Tomberg 1994; Rodriguez et al. 1999; Engel and Singer 2001; Melloni et al. 2007; Freeman 2007; Freeman and Vitiello 2007). Such attractors manage the transition from potentiality to actuality; that is, a potential conscious state is actualized once an attractor is fully unfolded and the concomitant ZPF information state is generated (Keppler 2013, 2018). In summary, our SED-based approach indicates that the creation principle in the universe, with respect to both physicality and phenomenology, is grounded in selective restriction of the omnipresent ZPF.

## 4. Reassessing Phenomenal Constitution in Light of the Filtering Hypothesis: Issues of Quality and Structure

The framework presented in the last two sections bears conspicuously on matters of phenomenal constitution. This is particularly evident with regard to constitution problems pertaining to the quality and structure of experience. In essence, we believe that our approach circumvents this family of problems, making them largely irrelevant for the kind of cosmopsychism we advocate. The core issue at stake is the compositional assumption that the experiences of nonfundamental subjects derive their qualities and structure from the qualities and structure of experiences consciously entertained at the fundamental level of reality (by a plurality of subjects according to micropsychism or by a single subject if cosmopsychism is presupposed). In other words, the crucial presupposition behind common formulations of the quality and the structure combination problems is that the experiences of macro-subjects are literally composed of, or fractured from, manifest experiences of elemental subjects. As noticed above (see section 1), the problem is to render these presupposed compositional relations intelligible. By contrast, the present framework breaks free from this core presupposition and in doing so avoids its tangles.

In the first place, our proposed framework avoids the assumption that there is a literal sense in which either the quality or the structure of the experiences of any single subject are derived (composed or fractured) from the manifest experiences of any other subject or subjects. Instead, as explained above, we employ the filtering hypothesis, according to which the phenomenal portrait of each quantum coherent system is a function of the manner in which it resonates with the ZPF, stirring the latter into a unique set of phase-locked modes. The individual dynamical properties and the contextual embeddedness of each such system ensure the uniqueness of the phenomenal portrait it carves for itself through its ongoing interaction with the ZPF, so that no two subjects are phenomenally identical in all respects. But insofar as the present problem is concerned, the main point is that no subject is phenomenally composed of or fractured from another subject; rather, each subject obtains its phenomenal character by tapping directly into the universal pool of cosmic consciousness immanent to the ZPF and by extracting from it a system-specific set of correlated resonance frequencies. (As panpsychists we still hold on to the idea that macro-subjects are physically constituted of micro-subjects: cells, atoms, etc. But the point is that once constituted as a complex physical entity with specific dynamical characteristics, each macro-subject obtains its phenomenology through resonant interaction with the background field, rather than by summing over the experiences of its micro-constituents.)

Equally important is the observation that while our approach identifies the conscious experiences of subjects with patterns of organization emergent within a universal field of cosmic consciousness (i.e., with phase-locked ZPF modes) we assume neither that these experiences are enjoyed by cosmic consciousness as its own nor that they constitute proper parts of extant cosmic experiences. Of crucial relevance, in this respect, is the distinction between implicit and explicit phenomenology. As mentioned earlier, we maintain that all conceivable shades of phenomenal consciousness are inherent in the frequency spectrum of the ZPF (see figure 2A). However, in the unorganized ground state of the background field these phenomenal nuances lie dormant and undifferentiated: they exist in potentia rather than in actualis, implicitly rather than explicitly. Thus, although the entire phenomenal 'color palette' is immanent in the ZPF, it would be a misinterpretation to conclude that a cosmic consciousness must therefore experience any of these potential states as an actual subjective experience: no ordinary concrete experience can be read into the ZPF in its default state of uncorrelated field modes.

Indeed, that our approach does not imply any ordinary phenomenal states on the part of cosmic consciousness can also be related from a different angle, that of traditional, spiritually based conceptions of cosmic consciousness. In line with such conceptions, we hold that cosmic consciousness is, fundamentally, a *pure* consciousness, that is, a formless sea of awareness that serves as the universal womb

out of which all creaturely forms of experience arise. This conception of the ultimate ground of being as a *pure* consciousness is perhaps most articulately developed in Hinduism and Buddhism, but traces of it can be found in spiritual traditions the world over, including: Taoism; the mystery cults of the ancient world; Neoplatonism; Christian, Jewish, and Muslim mysticism; Aztec philosophy, and more.

Could this formless ground state be nevertheless endowed with some fundamental phenomenal attributes? In spiritual traditions as well as in reports based on deep states of meditation, pure consciousness is often associated with an ineffable sense of unconditioned bliss, love, and unity. But even assuming the reality of such cosmic phenomenology, insofar as the present discussion is concerned, the relevant point is that there is no viable sense in which our ordinary experiences can be thought of as bits and pieces dissected from it. In other words, no mereological assumption of phenomenal decombination is involved.

Finally, the confusion between implicit and explicit phenomenology bears upon another misconception concerning cosmopsychism. As mentioned in section I, a key assumption behind the quality and the structure decombination problems is the austerity hypothesis, which implies that if there is such a thing as cosmic consciousness, then its experiences are relatively shallow and homogenous. Thus, the problem is to explain how the allegedly meager phenomenal landscape of cosmic consciousness could possibly ground the lavish phenomenology of creatures like us. Again, the perspective we bring to the table avoids the problem because, as mentioned earlier, while we take the ZPF to be phenomenally indescribably rich, its richness is implicit and in potentia. Thus, we make no assumption to the effect that the universal background field from which our experiences are ultimately derived is phenomenally affluent in the same explicit manner in which human experience may be said to be so. Instead, our approach enables us to explain how the phenomenal character of our everyday experience is grounded in cosmic consciousness without violating the letter of the austerity hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Cosmic Consciousness and the Constitution of Subjects

We come at last to the *subject* constitution problem. As noted in section 1, the challenge is to articulate a substantive and informative ontological sense in which the subjectivity of created subjects depends on the subjectivity inherent in cosmic consciousness—and to do so coherently, without succumbing to daunting conceptual aporia. The first task, to which we turn next, is to explain the place of subjectivity in the picture we advocate. Earlier, we pointed to the difference between cosmic consciousness and the consciousness of individual creatures by describing the former as pure consciousness, a limit state of consciousness characterized by a unitary sense of undifferentiated wholeness. In like manner

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Having said that, we consider the austerity hypothesis problematic in that it correlates informational richness with manifest physical complexity. While this assumption may be appropriate in classical physics, it does not seem in accord with quantum physics and the ontology of quantum fields. The ZPF is a case in point: judged by its surface structure it may appear barren and austere, but if one probes deeper into its potential for storing information and into the manner in which its dynamical properties substantiate all emergent concrete forms of matter, a very different perspective opens up.

(and, again, in alignment with spiritually informed commentary on the nature of absolute consciousness) we maintain also that cosmic consciousness realizes an analogous limit state of subjectivity and can therefore be described as a *pure subject*.

A pure subject is an aperspectival subject, that is, a universal subject devoid of individual conscious perspective. Regular subjects experience their inner reality and the world around them in a conditioned manner constrained by the unique particularities of their creaturely being: their body physique; the qualities of their senses; their present situatedness; past experience and accumulated memory; drives, desires, and conscious purposes; established knowledge structures; attitudes and judgments; unconscious complexes and tendencies; language; social and cultural conditioning; etc. Such constraining factors serve to delimit and shape one's experiential flow: constituting a unique mode of opening to the world, a specific (albeit open-ended) angle through which things are experienced. This constrained and qualified opening to the world is what we understand by perspective (see Shani 2015). It may be added also that the common manner in which perspectival subjects experience reality is dual: one experiences a world of objects (including inner objects, such as thoughts and feelings) 'over there', to be taken in by the here and now of one's own self. Thus, in contrast to regular subjects, a pure subject can be thought of as one whose subjectivity is free from the constraints of creaturely perspective and from the dual partitioning the latter imposes upon experience. In other words, the experience of a pure subject is aperspectival and nondual (for a detailed and informative analysis of this intriguing mode of subjectivity see Albahari, forthcoming).

Such negative characterization, however, gives rise to a legitimate concern, namely, whether a pure subject is a subject at all: in what sense can subjectivity survive the absence of perspective? What attributes, other than the existence of a perspective, could possibly justify the idea that cosmic consciousness possesses a subjective dimension? The answer to this question is that in the absence of perspective there remains ipseity, or selfhood as such: a *conscious presence* devoid of form and objects yet ready to assume ordinary qualitative tones and to serve as the apprehending recipient of objects if the right conditions for the emergence of an individual conscious perspective materialize. In the Hindu tradition this universal pure self is described as the *Atman*, and it is believed to be the ultimate ground of all perspectival conscious selves.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, on the view we advocate the ZPF is a bearer of pure consciousness as well as pure subjectivity. Consequently, consciousness and selfhood are posited as fundamental features of reality. What is not fundamental and therefore calls for explanation is the existence of *perspectival* selves endowed with structured

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In Advaita Vedanta and other spiritually informed wisdom traditions this conscious presence is often described as a *witness-consciousness* (see e.g., Fasching 2011). Albahari (forthcoming) associates witness consciousness with a present-moment sense of being, characterized by such properties as intransitivity (being nonobjectual) and reflexivity (being self-revealing). Such consciousness is also frequently described as *luminous*, by which it is meant that it possesses a power analogous to light, a power that 'illuminates or reveals things so they can be known' (Thompson 2015: 3). The concept of *ipseity* is regularly deployed in the phenomenological literature (e.g., Sokolowski 2000; Zahavi 2005), albeit without cosmic implications; but see Almaas (2004: ch. 21) for a discussion of ipseity in relation to pure consciousness.

experience. We have already demonstrated how structured experience could be intelligently grounded in the formless reservoir of cosmic consciousness. The remaining task is to explain how perspectival subjects emerge against the background of cosmic consciousness and in particular to explain how the subjectivity of such subjects is intelligently grounded in the pure subjectivity of the background field.

To do so, recall first what perspectival subjects are. They are localized centers of consciousness; they experience reality in a constrained and selective manner, through specific channels, portals, and filters (as it were); finally, although their field of experience is unified, it is structured and dually framed: presenting objects as given to an underlying apprehending recipient. Thus, if perspectival subjects are to appear on the cosmic scene, the minimal conditions for the materialization of these characteristic features must be met. We believe that the SED-based process dynamics described in sections 2 and 3 meets these minimal conditions. Let us first recapitulate the essentials of this process dynamics and then explain how it meets the prerequisites for the emergence of conscious perspectives.

In the first place, the physical narrative underlying our approach describes the formation of dynamically stable quantum systems in resonant equilibrium with the ZPF (see also Keppler 2016). Moreover, as explained, the equilibrium conditions lead to a partial ordering of the local field, inducing long-range coherence in the emergent quantum regime (see figure 1B, left). Finally, the same process whereby the ZPF is organized through the phase-locked coupling of the field modes involved in maintaining the attractor dynamics leads also to selective elicitation of structured phenomenal states (see figures 1B, right, and 2B). Each of these features, we argue, is relevant to the possibility of perspectival subjectivity.

First, the emergence of meta-stable attractors in energetic equilibrium with the ZPF marks the formation of localized regions of intensity—in constant interaction with, yet functionally distinct from, the surrounding field. Such intensified regions, which can also be thought of as vortices in the ocean of cosmic consciousness (Shani 2015), sustain an *inner* conscious domain that is shielded, to a degree, from its environment—a 'here' demarcated from whatever may lie out 'there'. Second, the physical boundaries of such stable organizations and the particularity of their individual characteristics serve as constraining factors that tether each system to specific modes of opening to the world, hence to a perspective. Third, the long-range coherence of such systems enables them (among other things) to sustain a *unity* of experience. Fourth, as explained before, the dynamical coupling of ZPF modes substantiates the fact that these emergent conscious centers are endowed with structured and variable experiences. Finally, operating in tandem, the structured texture of the emergent phenomenologies, the bifurcation between system and environment, and the fact that there is a great plurality of individuals each conditioning the experiences of others in multiple sorts of ways collectively account for the *dual* (i.e., subject-object) character of experience. Taken together, we believe that these factors substantiate a minimal sense of perspectival subjectivity.

The above discussion articulates a real sense in which perspectival subjects are grounded as subjects in the aperspectival ground of cosmic consciousness (for an alternative recent account see Albahari forthcoming). It remains to stress that

beyond all this there is also the issue of the grounding of perspectival selves in the *pure self* of cosmic consciousness. As mentioned before, we hold that cosmic consciousness is a bearer of pure subjectivity, namely, of a conscious *presence* devoid of form or objects yet ready to assume particulate qualitative tones and to serve as the apprehending recipient of objects. The emergence of dynamically stable systems in energetic equilibrium with the ZPF has the effect that each of these attractors continually modulates the local field in a particular manner. As a result, each of them appropriates to itself a selective portion of this universal subjective medium, molding it into a private realm engulfed by impulses, experiences, and endeavors—an *ego* aware of its objects and desires as it is unaware of its substantive unity with other selves and the ground of all being.

In sum, in as much as the problem of the constitution of subjects, as applied to cosmopsychism, is to articulate a substantive and informative ontological sense in which the subjectivity of created subjects is intelligently grounded in the subjectivity of cosmic consciousness, we believe that our account goes a long way toward addressing the challenge. Part of what makes the subject constitution problem so intractable is that it has been shown to repeatedly involve serious conceptual aporia. However, most, if not all, of these conceptual tangles appear to be related to the assumption that one perspectival subject is literally composed of, or fractured from, another (see section 1). In the idiom of cosmopsychism, the assumption is that the cosmos itself is a universal mind and that all lesser minds partake in it like colored tiles cut from a jigsaw puzzle's cardboard model—each carrying about itself a small piece of the grand picture. In contrast, our own approach assumes neither the existence of a universal perspectival subject nor a phenomenal decombination thereof. Put differently, our explanation of the emergence of subjects against the background of cosmic consciousness is free from problematic principles of phenomenal combination and perspectival inclusion. We hope we have done enough to elucidate the possibility of this alternative outlook and to motivate further investigations into its ultimate viability.

## 6. Implications and Explications

Having laid down the essentials of our approach, we would like in closing to address a few issues of general import to our enterprise—partly in order to address potential worries and partly with the purpose of pointing to relevant key questions that are beyond the scope of the present work.

One potential concern that might be raised with regard to our account is that the basic theoretical assumptions of our approach fail to close the explanatory gap concerning phenomenal consciousness. Why should the existence of a background field of cosmic consciousness, stirred into specific patterns of phase-locked ZPF modes, yield individual states of phenomenal consciousness? Could we not *conceive* that all of these activities occur and yet no ordinary states of phenomenal consciousness take place?

In response, we note first that questions of conceivability are hard to settle. To be sure, one can imagine without contradiction that the ZPF is not a carrier of (or identical with) cosmic consciousness or that the formation of phase-locked ZPF

modes is not the proper mechanism for extracting specific phenomenal states out of pure consciousness. But *if* one accepts the assumption that there is an underlying field of unlimited phenomenal spectrum and unbounded subjectivity whose default state is that of an undifferentiated unity as well as the assumption that the phase locking of field modes is an appropriate mechanism for differentiating this primal background field into partitioned classes of restricted phenomenal range and bounded subjectivity, is it then still conceivable that all the machinery described in sections 2 and 3 is in place and yet no ordinary phenomenal experiences ensue? Even though we find this question hard to answer beyond dispute, we hold the view that the ocean of consciousness in combination with the mechanism described above necessitates the existence of perspectival subjects endued with phenomenal awareness.

On this note, it is useful to observe the difference between the present scenario and the one that sustains the explanatory gap in the case of materialist theories of consciousness. In the latter case, conceivability arguments reflect the notion that we have principled reasons to doubt that phenomenal facts are necessitated by purely structural (or functional or organizational) facts—no matter *what* type of structural facts are involved (see Chalmers 2017). In contrast, on the present scenario the relevant structural facts (concerning the organization of the ZPF via phase locked field modes) are tasked not with the generation of experience per se but, rather, with its modulation and restricted expression, a task description that is well *within* the capabilities of organization and structure. What constitutes the right kind of organization is, of course, a matter of dispute, but there is no ground for deep skepticism regarding the very notion that *some kind* of organization sustains the grounding of ordinary experience in fundamental consciousness. In this vein, we motivate our specific account on both philosophical and scientific grounds.

Furthermore, as stressed earlier in sections 2 and 5, the deepest reason for believing the combination problem to be *unsolvable in principle* is due to the suspicion that intersubjective inclusion relations are downright incoherent (see Coleman [2014] for an argument to this effect against micropsychism, and Albahari [forthcoming] for an argument against cosmopsychism). This specter of incoherence breeds skepticism regarding the notion that any emergent organization could ever suffice to explain the grounding of ordinary experience in fundamental experience (if *nothing* could solve the problem, surely no proposed emergent organization could). By demonstrating that the postulate of subjective inclusion is avoidable, our proposal diminishes the case for deep skepticism regarding the prospects for closing the explanatory gap between fundamental experience and ordinary experience—and in doing so it moves the discussion forward.

A second important question relates to the relevance of SED to the formulation of our conceptual framework. In a nutshell, the approach presented is based on the conviction that in order to integrate consciousness coherently into the scientific worldview one has to resort to the most basic level of physics and follow the path of quantum theory. Since SED, as set out in section 2, affords a look behind the scenes of standard quantum theory, it is a natural choice to build our framework on SED. In particular, SED's advantage over standard quantum theory is that it sustains a more informative explanation of the interactive process through which individual

systems and the background field mutually influence each other. It should then be expected that *if* phenomenal qualities are dynamically extracted from the background field, as our filtering hypothesis maintains, then it is SED that provides the most informative account of this process. And it does so on a level that cannot be achieved by the apparatus of conventional quantum theory. As a result, new perspectives open up for the development of a fundamental theory of consciousness that preserves the principle of causal closure and respects the law of parsimony, which is reflected in the idea that by use of one and the same mechanism quantum systems acquire both their physical properties and their phenomenal qualities.

Another general question regarding our account pertains to its metaphysical status. The key concept of our proposal—the notion of a cosmic background field—is susceptible of two distinct metaphysical renderings: an *idealist* interpretation according to which it is strictly a field of consciousness and a *double-aspect* interpretation that sees it as the carrier of both primordial energy and primordial consciousness. As presented here (and despite some shifting overtones in either direction), our proposal remains agnostic regarding the choice between these two competing alternatives. We take full cognizance of the fact that the question which alternative is to be preferred is substantive: each of these two interpretations presents a different picture of reality, faces unique theoretical challenges, connects with a distinct philosophical pedigree, and has its own champions and detractors. There is no doubt that the question must ultimately be addressed. Nevertheless, we consider it an advantage of our approach that it can be formulated and evaluated in relative independence of the issue of its ultimate metaphysical interpretation.

We offer a novel hypothesis with a coherent research agenda. Our approach can be assessed with respect to its performance along crucial valuation standards, such as (a) addressing issues of mental combination and the emergence of ordinary experience; (b) delineating and explaining systematic connections between ZPF information states and articulated phenomenal states, resulting in the derivation of psychophysical mapping rules between particular qualia and particular sets of phase-locked ZPF modes, thus shedding light on the internal structure of qualia space (see Keppler 2016); and (c) meeting suitability criteria as a general theoretical framework concordant with robust empirical knowledge concerning the neural correlates of consciousness (see Keppler 2016, 2018). All of this, we maintain, can be done independently of settling the question of precise metaphysical interpretation—a question that, given its gravity and the complicated nature of the issues involved, we cannot hope to address properly on the present occasion. Moreover, we think it is reasonable to expect that a better understanding of the manner in which the ZPF grounds ordinary phenomenal states (if indeed it does) could prove itself instrumental in clarifying the nature of the underlying metaphysical landscape.

> ITAY SHANI SUN YAT SEN UNIVERSITY ishani479@hotmail.com

> > JOACHIM KEPPLER DIWISS

#### References

- Albahari, M. (Forthcoming) 'Beyond Cosmopsychism and the Great I Am: How the World might be Grounded in Universal "Advaitic" Consciousness'. In William Seager (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism* (New York, NY: Routledge).
- Almaas, A. H. (2004) The Inner Journey Home: The Soul's Realization of the Unity of Reality. Boston: Shambhala.
- Basile, P. (2010) 'It Must be True But How Can it Be? Some Remarks on Panpsychism and Mental Composition'. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 67, 93-112.
- Boyer, T. H. (1969) 'Derivation of the Blackbody Radiation Spectrum without Quantum Assumptions'. *Physical Review*, 182, 1374–83.
- Boyer, T. H. (1975) 'Random Electrodynamics: The Theory of Classical Electrodynamics with Classical Electromagnetic Zero-point Radiation'. *Physical Review D*, 11, 790–808.
- Brüntrup, G. (2017) 'Emergent Panpsychism'. In Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 48–72.
- Chalmers, D. J. (1996) The Conscious Mind: Towards a Fundamental Theory. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chalmers, D. J. (2015) 'Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism'. In Torin Alter and Yujin Nagawawa (eds.), Consciousness in the Physical World: Essays on Russellian Monism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 246–76.
- Chalmers, D. J. (2017) 'The Combination Problem for Panpsychism'. In Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 179–214.
- Chalmers, D. J. (Forthcoming) 'Idealism and the Mind-Body Problem'. In William Seager (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism* (New York, NY: Routledge).
- Coleman, S. (2012) 'Mental Chemistry: Combination for Panpsychists'. Dialectica, 66, 137-66.
- Coleman, S. (2014) 'The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-subjects, and Emergence'. *Erkenntnis*, 79, 19–44.
- Dainton, B. F. (2011) 'Review of Consciousness and Its Place in Nature'. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 83, 238-61.
- De la Peña, L., and A. M. Cetto. (1994) 'Quantum Phenomena and the Zeropoint Radiation Field'. Foundations of Physics, 24, 917–48.
- De la Peña, L., and A. M. Cetto. (1995) 'Quantum Phenomena and the Zeropoint Radiation Field II'. Foundations of Physics, 25, 573–604.
- De la Peña, L., and A. M. Cetto. (2001) 'Quantum Theory and Linear Stochastic Electrodynamics'. *Foundations of Physics*, 31, 1703–31.
- De la Peña, L., and A. M. Cetto. (2006) 'The Foundations of Linear Stochastic Electrodynamics'. *Foundations of Physics*, 36, 350–68.
- De la Peña, L., A. Valdés-Hernández, and A. M. Cetto. (2009) 'Quantum Mechanics as an Emergent Property of Ergodic Systems Embedded in the Zero-point Radiation Field'. *Foundations of Physics*, 39, 1240–72.
- De la Peña, L., A. M. Cetto, and A. Valdés-Hernández. (2015) *The Emerging Quantum: The Physics Behind Quantum Mechanics*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- De la Peña-Auerbach, L., and A. M. Cetto. (1977) 'Derivation of Quantum Mechanics from Stochastic Electrodynamics'. *Journal of Mathematical Physics*, 18, 1612–21.
- Del Giudice, E., A. De Ninno, M. Fleischmann, G. Mengoli, M. Milani, G. Talpo, and G. Vitiello. (2005) 'Coherent Quantum Electrodynamics in Living Matter'. *Electromagnetic Biology and Medicine*, 24, 199–210.
- Desmedt, J. E., and C. Tomberg. (1994) 'Transient Phase-locking of 40 Hz Electrical Oscillations in Prefrontal Parietal Cortex Reflects the Process of Conscious Somatic Perception'. *Neuroscience Letters*, 168, 126–9.
- Engel, A. K., and W. Singer. (2001) 'Temporal Binding and the Neural Correlates of Sensory Awareness'. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 5, 16–25.
- Fasching, W. (2011) 'I Am of the Nature of Seeing: Phenomenological Reflections on the Indian Notion of Witness-consciousness'. In Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi (eds.),

- Self, No self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 193–216.
- Freeman, W. J. (2007) 'Indirect Biological Measures of Consciousness from Field Studies of Brains as Dynamical Systems'. *Neural Networks*, 20, 1021–31.
- Freeman, W. J., and G. Vitiello. (2007) 'The Dissipative Quantum Model of Brain and Laboratory Observations'. *Electronic Journal of Theoretical Physics*, 4, 1–18.
- Goff, P. (2006) 'Experiences Don't Sum'. Journal of Consciousness Studies, 13, 53-61.
- Goff, P. (2009) 'Why Panpsychism doesn't Help Us Explain Consciousness'. *Dialectica*, 63, 289-311.
- Goff, P. (2017) Consciousness and Fundamental Reality. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goff, P. (Forthcoming) 'Micropsychism, Cosmopsychism, and the Grounding Relation'. In William Seager (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism* (New York, NY: Routledge).
- James, W. ([1890] 1950) The Principles of Psychology (vol. 1). Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.
- Jaskolla, L. J., and A. J. Buck. (2012) 'Does Panexperiential Holism Solve the Combination Problem?' Journal of Consciousness Studies, 19, 190–9.
- Keppler, J. (2012) 'A Conceptual Framework for Consciousness Based on a Deep Understanding of Matter'. *Philosophy Study*, 2, 689–703.
- Keppler, J. (2013) 'A New Perspective on the Functioning of the Brain and the Mechanisms behind Conscious Processes'. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 242.
- Keppler, J. (2016) 'On the Universal Mechanism Underlying Conscious Systems and the Foundations for a Theory of Consciousness'. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 6, 346–67.
- Keppler, J. (2018) 'The Role of the Brain in Conscious Processes: A New Way of Looking at the Neural Correlates of Consciousness'. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1346.
- Lockwood, M. (1993) 'The Grain Problem'. In Howard Robinson (ed.), Objections to Physicalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 271–91.
- Marshall, T. W. (1963) 'Random Electrodynamics'. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London A*, 276, 475–91.
- Marshall, T. W. (1965) 'Statistical Electrodynamics'. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, 61, 537–46.
- Mathews, F. (2011) 'Panpsychism as Paradigm'. In Michael Blamauer (ed.), *The Mental as Fundamental: New Perspectives on Panpsychism* (Heusenstamm: Ontos Verlag), 141–56.
- Melloni, L., C. Molina, M. Pena, D. Torres, W. Singer, and E. Rodriguez (2007). 'Synchronization of Neural Activity across Cortical Areas Correlates with Conscious Perception'. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 27, 2858–65.
- Miller, G. (2018) 'Can Subjects Be Proper Parts of Subjects? The De-Combination Problem'. *Ratio*, 31, 137–54.
- Mørch, H. H. (2014) 'Panpsychism and Causation: A New Argument and a Solution to the Combination Problem'. PhD diss., University of Oslo.
- Nagasawa, Y., and K. Wager. (2017) 'Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism'. In Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 113–29.
- Rodriguez, E., N. George, J. P. Lachaux, J. Martinerie, B. Renault, and F. J. Varela. (1999) 'Perception's Shadow: Long Distance Synchronization of Human Brain Activity. *Nature*, 397, 430–33.
- Roelofs, L. (2015) 'Combining Minds: A Defence of the Possibility of Experiential Combination'. PhD diss., University of Toronto.
- Rosenberg, G. (2004) A Place for Consciousness: Probing the Deep Structure of the Natural World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Seager, W. E. (1995) 'Consciousness, Information, and Panpsychism'. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2, 272–88.
- Seager, W. E. (2017) 'Panpsychist Infusion'. In Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 229–48.
- Sellars, W. (1965) 'The Identity Approach to the Mind-body Problem'. *Review of Metaphysics*, 18, 430–51.

- Shani, I. (2015) 'Cosmopsychism: A Holistic Approach to the Metaphysics of Experience'. Philosophical Papers, 44, 389-437.
- Smolin, L. (2015) 'Temporal Naturalism'. Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part B: Studies in History and Philosophy of Modern Physics, 52, 86–102.
- Sokolowski, R. (2000) Introduction to Phenomenology. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Strawson, G. (2006) 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism'. Journal of Consciousness Studies, 13, 3-31.
- Strawson, G. (Forthcoming) 'Realistic Idealism, or What Does "Physical" Mean?' In William Seager (ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism (New York, NY: Routledge).
- Thompson, E. (2015) Waking, Dreaming, Being. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Zahavi, D. (2005) Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-person Perspective. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

## **Paul Tillich**

**Paul Johannes Tillich** (August 20, 1886 – October 22, 1965) was a German-American <u>Christian existentialist philosopher</u> and <u>Lutheran Protestant theologian</u> who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century. [5] Tillich taught at a number of universities in Germany before immigrating to the United States in 1933, where he taught at <u>Union Theological Seminary</u>, <u>Harvard Divinity School</u>, and the <u>University of Chicago</u>.

Among the general public, Tillich is best known for his works *The Courage to Be* (1952) and *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), which introduced issues of theology and culture to a general readership. In academic theology, he is best known for his major three-volume work *Systematic Theology* (1951–63), in which he developed his "method of correlation," an approach that explores the symbols of Christian <u>revelation</u> as answers to the problems of human existence raised by contemporary <u>existential</u> analysis. [ $\overline{b}$  Unlike mainstream interpretations of existentialism which emphasized the priority of existence over <u>essence</u>, Tillich considered existentialism "possible only as an element in a larger whole, as an element in a vision of the structure of <u>being</u> in its created goodness, and then as a description of man's existence within that framework."[8]

Tillich's unique integration of essentialism and existentialism, as well as his sustained engagement with ontology in the *Systematic Theology* and other works, has attracted scholarship from a variety of influential thinkers including Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, George Lindbeck, Erich Przywara, Langdon Gilkey, James Luther Adams, Avery Cardinal Dulles, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sallie McFague, Richard John Neuhaus, David Novak, John D. Caputo, Thomas Merton, Robert W. Jenson, Thomas F. O'Meara O.P., and Martin Luther King, Jr. According to H. Richard Niebuhr, "[t]he reading of *Systematic Theology* can be a great voyage of discovery into a rich and deep, and inclusive and yet elaborated, vision and understanding of human life in the presence of the mystery of God." John H. Randall, Jr. lauded the *Systematic Theology* as "beyond doubt the richest, most suggestive, and most challenging philosophical theology our day has produced."

In addition to Tillich's work in theology, he also authored many works in ethics, the philosophy of history, and comparative religion. Tillich's work continues to be studied and discussed around the world, and the North American Paul Tillich Society, Deutsche Paul-Tillich-Gesellschaft, and l'Association Paul Tillich d'expression française regularly host international conferences and seminars on his thought and its possibilities.

#### **Contents**

#### Biography

#### Philosophy and theology

Being

God as the ground of being

Method of correlation
Life and the Spirit

Absolute faith

Faith as ultimate concern

Tillich's ontology of courage

### Popular works

Reception

Criticism

Works

See also

References

**Further reading** 

**External links** 

#### **Paul Tillich**



3orn	Paul Johannes Tillich
	August 20, 1886
	Starzeddel, Province of
	Brandenburg, Prussia,
	German Empire
Died	October 22, 1965 (aged

79)

States

Nationality German American

Occupation Theologian and philosopher

Notable work 1951–63 Systematic Theology

Chicago, Illinois, United

1952 The Courage to Be

Spouse(s) Hannah

Children René (b. 1935), Mutie (b. 1926)

Theological work

 Language
 English · German

 Tradition or movement
 Christian existentialism

 Main interests
 Ontology Philosophical theology Existential analysis

Notable Method of correlation
ideas Protestant principle
and Catholic substance[1]
Ground of being[2]
New Being[3]

<u>Kairos</u> Theonomy<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Biography**

Tillich was born on August 20, 1886, in the small village of Starzeddel (Starosiedle), Province of Brandenburg, which was then part of Germany. He was the oldest of three children, with two sisters: Johanna (born 1888, died 1920) and Elisabeth (born 1893). Tillich's Prussian father Johannes Tillich was a conservative Lutheran pastor of the Evangelical State Church of Prussia's older Provinces; his mother Mathilde Dürselen was from the Rhineland and more liberal.

When Tillich was four, his father became <u>superintendent</u> of a diocese in <u>Bad Schönfliess</u> (now <u>Trzcińsko-Zdrój</u>, Poland), a town of three thousand, where Tillich began primary school (*Elementarschule*). In 1898, Tillich was sent to <u>Königsberg in der Neumark</u> (now <u>Chojna</u>, Poland) to begin his <u>gymnasium</u> schooling. He was billeted in a boarding house and experienced a loneliness that he sought to overcome by reading the Bible while encountering <u>humanistic</u> ideas at school. [7]

In 1900, Tillich's father was transferred to Berlin, resulting in Tillich's switching in 1901 to a Berlin school, from which he graduated in 1904. Before his graduation, however, his mother died of cancer in September 1903, when Tillich was 17. Tillich attended several universities — the University of Berlin beginning in 1904, the University of Tübingen in 1905, and the University of Halle-Wittenberg from 1905 to 1907. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Breslau in 1911 and his Licentiate of Theology degree at Halle-Wittenberg in 1912. [7] His PhD dissertation at Breslau was *The Conception of the History of Religion in Schelling's Positive Philosophy: Its Presuppositions and Principles*. [11]

During his time at university, he became a member of the Wingolf Christian fraternity in Berlin, Tübingen and Halle. [12]

That same year, 1912, Tillich was ordained as a Lutheran minister in the Province of Brandenburg. On 28 September 1914 he married Margarethe ("Grethi") Wever (1888–1968), and in October he joined the Imperial German Army as a chaplain during World War I. Grethi deserted Tillich in 1919 after an affair that produced a child not fathered by Tillich; the two then divorced. [13] During the war, Tillich served as a chaplain in the trenches, burying his closest friend and numerous soldiers in the mud of France. He was hospitalized three times for combat trauma, and was awarded the Iron Cross for bravery under fire. He came home from the war shattered. [14] Tillich's academic career began after the war; he became a Privatdozent of Theology at the University of Berlin, a post he held from 1919 to 1924. On his return from the war he had met Hannah Werner-Gottschow, then married and pregnant. [15] In March 1924 they married; it was the second marriage for both. She later wrote a book entitled From Time to Time about their life together, which included their commitment to open marriage, upsetting to some; despite this, they remained together into old age. [16]

From 1924 to 1925, Tillich served as a Professor of Theology at the <u>University of Marburg</u>, where he began to develop his systematic theology, teaching a course on it during the last of his three terms. While at Marburg, Tillich met and developed a relationship with <u>Martin Heidegger</u>. [17] From 1925 until 1929, Tillich was a Professor of Theology at the <u>Dresden University of Technology</u> and the <u>University of Leipzig</u>. He held the same post at the <u>University of Frankfurt</u> from 1929 to 1933. Paul Tillich was in conversation with <u>Erich Przywara</u>. [18]

While at the University of Frankfurt, Tillich traveled throughout Germany giving public lectures and speeches that brought him into conflict with the  $\underline{\text{Nazi}}$  movement. When  $\underline{\text{Adolf Hitler}}$  became German Chancellor in 1933, Tillich was dismissed from his position.  $\underline{\text{Reinhold Niebuhr}}$  visited Germany in the summer of 1933 and, already impressed with Tillich's writings, contacted Tillich upon learning of his dismissal. Niebuhr urged Tillich to join the faculty at New York City's Union Theological Seminary; Tillich accepted.  $\underline{\text{I19}[20]}$ 

At the age of 47, Tillich moved with his family to the United States. This meant learning English, the language in which he would eventually publish works such as the *Systematic Theology*. From 1933 until 1955 he taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he began as a Visiting Professor of Philosophy of Religion. During 1933–34 he was also a Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy at Columbia University. [7]

The Fellowship of Socialist Christians was organized in the early 1930s by Reinhold Niebuhr and others with similar views. Later it changed its name to Frontier Fellowship and then to Christian Action. The main supporters of the Fellowship in the early days included Tillich, Eduard Heimann, Sherwood Eddy and Rose Terlin. In its early days the group thought capitalist individualism was incompatible with Christian ethics. Although not Communist, the group acknowledged Karl Marx's social philosophy. [21]

Tillich acquired tenure at the Union Theological Seminary in 1937, and in 1940 he was promoted to Professor of Philosophical Theology and became an American citizen. [7] At Union, Tillich earned his reputation, publishing a series of books that outlined his particular synthesis of Protestant Christian theology and existential philosophy. He published *On the Boundary* in 1936; *The Protestant Era*, a collection of his essays, in 1948; and *The Shaking of the Foundations*, the first of three volumes of his sermons, also in 1948. His collections of sermons gave him a broader audience than he had yet experienced.

Tillich's most heralded achievements, though, were the 1951 publication of volume one of the *Systematic Theology* (University of Chicago Press), and the 1952 publication of *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press). [22] The first volume of the systematic theology examines the inner tensions in the structure of reason and being, primarily through a study in ontology. These tensions, Tillich contends, show that the quest for revelation is implied in finite reason, and that the quest for the ground of being is implied in finite being. The publication of *Systematic Theology*, *Vol. 1* brought Tillich international academic acclaim, prompting an invitation to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures in 1953–54 at the University of Aberdeen.



Tillich's gravestone in Paul Tillich Park, New Harmony, Indiana

The Courage to Be, which examines ontic, moral, and spiritual anxieties across history and in modernity, was based on Tillich's 1950 Dwight H. Terry Lectureship and reached a wide general readership.  $1950 \, \text{Dwight H.}$ 

These works led to an appointment at  $\underline{\text{Harvard Divinity School}}$  in 1955, where he was University Professor,  $\underline{^{[23]}}$  among the five highest ranking professors at Harvard. He was primarily a professor of undergraduates, because Harvard did not have a department of religion for them, but was thereby more exposed to the wider university and "most fully embodied the ideal of a University Professor."  $\underline{^{[24]}}$  In 1959, Tillich was featured on the cover of  $\underline{\textit{Time}}$  magazine.  $\underline{^{[25]}}$ 

In 1961, Tillich became one of the founding members of the Society for the Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture, an organization with which he maintained ties for the remainder of his life. [26] During this period, he published volume two of the *Systematic Theology*, as well as the popular book *Dynamics of Faith*, both in 1957. Tillich's career at Harvard lasted until 1962, when he was appointed John Nuveen Professor of Theology at the <u>University of Chicago</u>. He remained at Chicago until his death in 1965.

Volume three of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* was published in 1963. In 1964, Tillich became the first theologian to be honored in Kegley and Bretall's *Library of Living Theology*: "The adjective 'great,' in our opinion, can be applied to very few thinkers of our time, but Tillich, we are far from alone in believing, stands unquestionably amongst these few." A widely quoted critical assessment of his importance was Georgia Harkness' comment: "What Whitehead was to American philosophy, Tillich has been to American theology." What was to American philosophy, Tillich has been to American theology."

Tillich died on October 22, 1965, ten days after having a heart attack. In 1966, his ashes were interred in the <u>Paul Tillich Park</u> in <u>New Harmony</u>, <u>Indiana</u>. His gravestone inscription reads: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit for his season, his leaf also shall not wither. And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." (Psalm 1:3)

## Philosophy and theology

#### **Being**

Tillich used the concept of being (Sein) throughout his philosophical and theological work. Some of his work engaged with the fundamental ontology of Martin Heidegger, [30]

For "being" remains the content, the mystery, and the eternal *aporia* of thinking. No theology can suppress the notion of being as the power of being. One cannot separate them. In the moment in which one says that God *is* or that he has being, the question arises as to how his relation to being is understood. The only possible answer seems to be that God is being-itself, in the sense of the power of being or the power to conquer nonbeing.

Tillich's preliminary analysis of being ascends from the human <u>subject</u>'s asking of the ontological question ("What is being itself?"), upwards to the highest categories of <u>metaphysics. [32]</u> He distinguishes among four levels of ontological analysis: self-world; dynamics and form, freedom and destiny, and <u>individualization</u> and participation; essential being and existential being; and time, space, causality, and substance.

Being plays a key role throughout Tillich's Systematic Theology. In the opening to the second volume, Tillich writes:

When a doctrine of God is initiated by defining God as being-itself, the philosophical concept of being is introduced into systematic theology ... It appears in the present system in three places: in the doctrine of God, where God is called the being as being or the ground and the power of being; in the doctrine of man, where the distinction is carried through between man's essential and his existential being; and finally, in the doctrine of the Christ, where he is called the manifestation of the New Being, the actualization of which is the work of the divine Spirit.

— Tillich<sup>[37]</sup>

#### God as the ground of being

Throughout most of his work Tillich provides an ontological view of God as being-itself, the ground of being, and the power of being, one in which God is beyond essence and existence. [38] He was critical of conceptions of God as a being (e.g., the highest being), as well as of pantheistic conceptions of God as universal essence. Traditional medieval philosophical theology in the work of figures such as St. Anselm, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham tended to understand God as the highest existing being, to which predicates such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, goodness, righteousness, holiness, etc. may be ascribed. Arguments for and against the existence of God presuppose such an understanding of God. Tillich is critical of this mode of discourse, which he refers to as "theological theism," and argues that if God is a being, even if the highest being, God cannot be properly called the source of all being. With respect to both God's existence and essence, moreover, Tillich shows how difficulties beset Thomas Aquinas' attempt to "maintain the truth that God is beyond essence and existence while simultaneously arguing for the existence of God." [39]



Bust of Tillich by <u>James Rosati</u> in New Harmony, Indiana

Though Tillich is critical of propositional arguments for the existence of God as found in natural theology, as he considers them objectifying of God, he nonetheless affirms the reality of God as the ground of being. A similar line of thought is found

in the work of Eric Voegelin. [40] Tillich's concept of God can be drawn out from his analysis of being. In Tillich's analysis of being, all of being experiences the threat of nonbeing. Yet, following Heidegger, Tillich claims that it is human beings alone who can raise the question of being and therefore of being-itself. [41] This is because, he contends, human beings' "infinite self-transcendence is an expression of [their] belonging to that which is beyond nonbeing, namely, to being-itself ... Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself. "[42]

Tillich addresses questions both ontological and personalist concerning God. One issue deals with whether and in what way personal language about the nature of God and humanity's relationship to God is appropriate. In distinction to "theological theism", Tillich refers to another kind of theism as that of the "divine-human encounter". Such is the theism of the encounter with the "Wholly Other" ("Das ganz Andere"), as in the work of Karl Barth and Rudolf Otto. It implies a personalism with regard to God's self-revelation. Tillich is quite clear that this is both appropriate and necessary, as it is the basis of the personalism of biblical religion altogether and of the concept of the "Word of God",  $\frac{(43)}{1}$  but can become falsified if the theologian tries to turn such encounters with God as the Wholly Other into an understanding of God as a being.  $\frac{(44)}{1}$  In other words, God is both personal and transpersonal.

Tillich's ontological view of God has precedent in Christian theology. In addition to affinities with the concept of God as being-itself in classical theism, it shares similarities with Hellenistic and Patristic conceptions of God as the "unoriginate source" (agennetos) of all being. [46] This view was espoused in particular by Origen, one of a number of early theologians whose thought influenced Tillich's. Their views in turn had pre-Christian precedents in middle Platonism. Aside from classical and Christian influences in Tillich's concept of God, there is a dynamism in Tillich's notion of "the living God," reflecting some influence from Spinoza. [47]

Tillich combines his ontological conception of God with a largely existential and phenomenological understanding of faith in God, remarking that God is "the answer to the question implied in man's finitude ... the name for that which concerns man ultimately." [48] This is notably manifest in his understanding of faith as ultimate concern. Following his existential analysis, Tillich further argues that theological theism is not only logically problematic, but is unable to speak into the situation of radical doubt and despair about meaning in life. This issue, he said, was of primary concern in the modern age, as opposed to anxiety about fate, guilt, death and condemnation. This is because the state of finitude entails by necessity anxiety, and that it is our finitude as human beings, our being a mixture of being and nonbeing, that is at the ultimate basis of anxiety. If God is not the ground of being, then God cannot provide an answer to the question of finitude; God would also be finite in some sense. The term "God Above God," then, means to indicate the God who appears, who is the ground of being, when the "God" of theological theism has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt. While on the one hand this God goes beyond the God of theism as usually defined, it finds expression in many religious symbols of the Christian faith, particularly that of the crucified Christ. The possibility thus exists, says Tillich, that religious symbols may be recovered which would otherwise have been rendered ineffective by contemporary society.

Tillich argues that the God of theological theism is at the root of much revolt against theism and religious faith in the modern period. Tillich states, sympathetically, that the God of theological theism

deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. I revolt and make *him* into an object, but the revolt fails and becomes desperate. God appears as the invincible tyrant, the being in contrast with whom all other beings are without freedom and subjectivity. He is equated with the recent tyrants who with the help of terror try to transform everything into a mere object, a thing among things, a cog in a machine they control. He becomes the model of everything against which Existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control. This is the deepest root of atheism. It is an atheism which is justified as the reaction against theological theism and its disturbing implications. [51]

Another reason Tillich criticized theological theism was because it placed God into the subject-object <u>dichotomy</u>. The subject-object dichotomy is the basic distinction made in <u>epistemology</u>. Epistemologically, God cannot be made into an object, that is, an object of the knowing subject. Tillich deals with this question under the rubric of the relationality of God. The question is "whether there are external relations between God and the creature". Traditionally Christian theology has always understood the doctrine of creation to mean precisely this external relationality between God, the Creator, and the creature as separate and not identical realities. Tillich reminds us of the point, which can be found in Luther, that "there is no place to which man can withdraw from the divine thou, because it includes the ego and is nearer to the ego than the ego to itself". [52]

Tillich goes further to say that the desire to draw God into the subject—object dichotomy is an "insult" to the divine holiness. [53] Similarly, if God were made into the subject rather than the object of knowledge (The Ultimate Subject), then the rest of existing entities then become subjected to the absolute knowledge and scrutiny of God, and the human being is "reified," or made into a mere object. It would deprive the person of his or her own subjectivity and creativity. According to Tillich,

theological theism has provoked the rebellions found in atheism and Existentialism, although other social factors such as the <u>industrial revolution</u> have also contributed to the "reification" of the human being. The modern man could no longer tolerate the idea of being an "object" completely subjected to the absolute knowledge of God. Tillich argued, as mentioned, that theological theism is "bad theology".

The God of the theological theism is a being besides others and as such a part of the whole reality. He is certainly considered its most important part, but as a part and therefore as subjected to the structure of the whole. He is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories which constitute reality. But every statement subjects him to them. He is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which relates to a thought, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and endless time. He is a being, not being-itself $\frac{[49]}{}$ 

Alternatively, Tillich presents the above-mentioned ontological view of God as Being-Itself, Ground of Being, Power of Being, and occasionally as Abyss or God's "Abysmal Being". What makes Tillich's ontological view of God different from theological theism is that it transcends it by being the foundation or ultimate reality that "precedes" all beings. Just as Being for Heidegger is ontologically *prior* to conception, Tillich views God to be beyond being. 154 God is not a supernatural entity among other entities. Instead, God is the inexhaustible ground which empowers the existence of beings. We cannot perceive God as an object which is related to a subject because God *precedes* the subject—object dichotomy.

Thus Tillich dismisses a literalistic <u>Biblicism</u>. Instead of rejecting the notion of personal God, however, Tillich sees it as a symbol that points directly to the Ground of Being. Since the Ground of Being ontologically precedes reason, it cannot be comprehended since comprehension presupposes the subject—object dichotomy. Tillich disagreed with any literal philosophical and religious statements that can be made about God. Such literal statements attempt to define God and lead not only to anthropomorphism but also to a philosophical mistake that <u>Immanuel Kant</u> warned against, that setting limits against the transcendent inevitably leads to contradictions. Any statements about God are simply symbolic, but these symbols are sacred in the sense that they function to participate or point to the Ground of Being.

Tillich also further elaborated the thesis of the God above the God of theism in his Systematic Theology.

- ... (the God above the God of theism) This has been misunderstood as a dogmatic statement of a pantheistic or mystical character. First of all, it is not a dogmatic, but an apologetic, statement. It takes seriously the radical doubt experienced by many people. It gives one the courage of self-affirmation even in the extreme state of radical doubt.
  - Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol. 2, p. 12
- ... In such a state the God of both religious and theological language disappears. But something remains, namely, the seriousness of that doubt in which meaning within meaninglessness is affirmed. The source of this affirmation of meaning within meaninglessness, of certitude within doubt, is not the God of traditional theism but the "God above God," the power of being, which works through those who have no name for it, not even the name God.
  - Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol. 2, p. 12
- ... This is the answer to those who ask for a message in the nothingness of their situation and at the end of their courage to be. But such an extreme point is not a space with which one can live. The dialectics of an extreme situation are a criterion of truth but not the basis on which a whole structure of truth can be built.
  - Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol. 2, p.12

### **Method of correlation**

The key to understanding Tillich's theology is what he calls the "method of correlation." It is an approach that correlates insights from Christian  $\underline{\text{revelation}}$  with the issues raised by existential, psychological, and philosophical analyses. [6]

Tillich states in the introduction to the *Systematic Theology*:

Theology formulates the questions implied in human existence, and theology formulates the answers implied in divine self-manifestation under the guidance of the questions implied in human existence. This is a circle which drives man to a point where question and answer are not separated. This point, however, is not a moment in time. [56]

The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence. These answers are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based and are taken by systematic theology from the sources, through the medium, under the norm. Their content cannot be derived from questions that would come from an analysis of human existence. They are 'spoken' to human existence from beyond it, in a sense. Otherwise, they would not be answers, for the question is human existence itself. [57]

For Tillich, the existential questions of human existence are associated with the field of philosophy and, more specifically, ontology (the study of being). This is because, according to Tillich, a lifelong pursuit of philosophy reveals that the central question of every philosophical inquiry always comes back to the question of being, or what it means to be, and, consequently, what it means to be a finite human being within being. [58] To be correlated with existential questions are theological answers, themselves derived from Christian revelation. The task of the philosopher primarily involves developing the questions, whereas the task of the theologian primarily involves developing the answers to these questions. However, it should be remembered that the two tasks overlap and include one another: the theologian must be somewhat of a philosopher and vice versa, for Tillich's notion of faith as "ultimate concern" necessitates that the theological answer be correlated with, compatible with, and in response to the general ontological question which must be developed independently from the answers. [59][60] Thus, on one side of the correlation lies an ontological analysis of the human situation, whereas on the other is a presentation of the Christian message as a response to this existential dilemma. For Tillich, no formulation of the question can contradict the theological answer. This is because the Christian message claims, a priori, that the logos "who became flesh" is also the universal logos of the Greeks. [61]

In addition to the intimate relationship between philosophy and theology, another important aspect of the method of correlation is Tillich's distinction between form and content in the theological answers. While the nature of revelation determines the actual content of the theological answers, the character of the questions determines the form of these answers. This is because, for Tillich, theology must be an answering theology, or apologetic theology. God is called the "ground of being" in part because God is the answer to the ontological threat of non-being, and this characterization of the theological answer in philosophical terms means that the answer has been conditioned (insofar as its form is considered) by the question.  $\frac{[57]}{}$  Throughout the *Systematic Theology*, Tillich is careful to maintain this distinction between form and content without allowing one to be inadvertently conditioned by the other. Many criticisms of Tillich's methodology revolve around this issue of whether the integrity of the Christian message is really maintained when its form is conditioned by philosophy.  $\frac{[62]}{}$ 

The theological answer is also determined by the sources of theology, our experience, and the norm of theology. Though the form of the theological answers are determined by the character of the question, these answers (which "are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based") are also "taken by systematic theology from the sources, through the medium, under the norm." There are three main sources of systematic theology: the Bible, Church history, and the history of religion and culture. Experience is not a source but a medium through which the sources speak. And the norm of theology is that by which both sources and experience are judged with regard to the content of the Christian faith. Thus, we have the following as elements of the method and structure of systematic theology:

- Sources of theology<sup>[64]</sup>
  - Bible<sup>[65]</sup>
  - Church history
  - · History of religion and culture
- Medium of the sources
  - Collective experience of the Church
- Norm of theology (determines use of sources)
  - Content of which is the biblical message itself, for example:
    - Justification through faith
    - New Being in Jesus as the Christ
    - The Protestant principle
    - The criterion of the cross

As McKelway explains, the sources of theology contribute to the formation of the norm, which then becomes the criterion through which the sources and experience are judged. The relationship is circular, as it is the present situation which conditions the norm in the interaction between church and biblical message. The norm is then subject to change, but Tillich insists that its basic content remains the same: that of the biblical message. It is tempting to conflate revelation with the norm, but we must keep in mind that revelation (whether original or dependent) is not an element of the structure of systematic theology per se, but an event. For Tillich, the present-day norm is the "New Being in Jesus as the Christ as our Ultimate Concern". It is because the present question is one of estrangement, and the overcoming of this estrangement is what Tillich calls the "New Being". But since Christianity answers the question of estrangement with "Jesus as the Christ", the norm tells us that we find the New Being in Jesus as the Christ.

There is also the question of the validity of the method of correlation. Certainly one could reject the method on the grounds that there is no *a priori* reason for its adoption. But Tillich claims that the method of any theology and its system are interdependent. That is, an absolute methodological approach cannot be adopted because the method is continually being determined by the system and the objects of theology. [70]

## Life and the Spirit

This is part four of Tillich's Systematic Theology. In this part, Tillich talks about life and the divine Spirit.

Life remains ambiguous as long as there is life. The question implied in the ambiguities of life derives to a new question, namely, that of the direction in which life moves. This is the question of history. Systematically speaking, history, characterized as it is by its direction toward the future, is the dynamic quality of life. Therefore, the "riddle of history" is a part of the problem of life. [71]

## Absolute faith

Tillich stated the courage to take meaninglessness into oneself presupposes a relation to the ground of being: absolute faith. [72] Absolute faith can transcend the theistic idea of God, and has three elements.

... The first element is the experience of the power of being which is present even in the face of the most radical manifestation of non being. If one says that in this experience vitality resists despair, one must add that vitality in man is proportional to intentionality.

The vitality that can stand the abyss of meaninglessness is aware of a hidden meaning within the destruction of meaning.

— Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p.177

The second element in absolute faith is the dependence of the experience of nonbeing on the experience of being and the dependence of the experience of meaninglessness on the experience of meaning. Even in the state of despair one has enough being to make despair possible.

- Tillich, The Courage to Be, p.177

There is a third element in absolute faith, the acceptance of being accepted. Of course, in the state of despair there is nobody and nothing that accepts. But there is the power of acceptance itself which is experienced. Meaninglessness, as long as it is experienced, includes an experience of the "power of acceptance". To accept this power of acceptance consciously is the religious answer of absolute faith, of a faith which has been deprived by doubt of any concrete content, which nevertheless is faith and the source of the most paradoxical manifestation of the courage to be.

#### Faith as ultimate concern

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Tillich believes the essence of religious attitudes is what he calls "ultimate concern". Separate from all profane and ordinary realities, the object of the concern is understood as sacred, <u>numinous</u> or holy. The perception of its reality is felt as so overwhelming and valuable that all else seems insignificant, and for this reason requires total surrender. In 1957, Tillich defined his conception of faith more explicitly in his work, *Dynamics of Faith*.

Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his very existence ... If [a situation or concern] claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim ... it demands that all other concerns ... be sacrificed.[74]

Tillich further refined his conception of faith by stating that, "Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It is the most centered act of the human mind ... it participates in the dynamics of personal life." [75]

An arguably central component of Tillich's concept of faith is his notion that faith is "ecstatic". That is to say:

It transcends both the drives of the nonrational unconsciousness and the structures of the rational conscious ... the ecstatic character of faith does not exclude its rational character although it is not identical with it, and it includes nonrational strivings without being identical with them. 'Ecstasy' means 'standing outside of oneself' - without ceasing to be oneself - with all the elements which are united in the personal center. [76]

In short, for Tillich, faith does not stand opposed to rational or nonrational elements (reason and emotion respectively), as some philosophers would maintain. Rather, it *transcends* them in an ecstatic passion for the ultimate. [77]

It should also be noted that Tillich does not exclude <u>atheists</u> in his exposition of faith. Everyone has an ultimate concern, and this concern can be in an act of faith, "even if the act of faith includes the denial of God. Where there is ultimate concern, God can be denied only in the name of God" [78]

#### Tillich's ontology of courage

In Paul Tillich's work *The Courage to Be* he defines courage as the self-affirmation of one's being in spite of a threat of nonbeing. He relates courage to anxiety, anxiety being the threat of non-being and the courage to be what we use to combat that threat. For Tillich, he outlines three types of anxiety and thus three ways to display the courage to be.

- 1) The Anxiety of Fate and Death a. The Anxiety of Fate and Death is the most basic and universal form of anxiety for Tillich. It relates quite simply to the recognition of our mortality. This troubles us humans. We become anxious when we are unsure whether our actions create a causal damnation which leads to a very real and quite unavoidable death (42-44). "Nonbeing threatens man's ontic self-affirmation, relatively in terms of fate, absolutely in terms of death" (41). b. We display courage when we cease to rely on others to tell us what will come of us, (what will happen when we die etc.) and begin seeking those answers out for ourselves. Called the "courage of confidence" (162-63).
- 2) The Anxiety of Guilt and Condemnation a. This anxiety afflicts our moral self-affirmation. We as humans are responsible for our moral being, and when asked by our judge (whomever that may be) what we have made of ourselves we must answer. The anxiety is produced when we realize our being is unsatisfactory. "It [Nonbeing] threatens man's moral self-affirmation, relatively in terms of guilt, absolutely in terms of condemnation" (41). b. We display courage when we first identify our sin; despair or whatever is causing us guilt or afflicting condemnation. We then rely on the idea that we are accepted regardless. "The courage to be is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable" (164).
- 3) The Anxiety of Meaninglessness and Emptiness a. The Anxiety of Meaninglessness and Emptiness attacks our being as a whole. We worry about the loss of an ultimate concern or goal. This anxiety is also brought on by a loss of spirituality. We as beings feel the threat of non-being when we feel we have no place or purpose in the world. "It [Nonbeing] threatens man's spiritual self-affirmation, relatively in terms of emptiness, absolutely in terms of meaninglessness" (41). b. We display the courage to be when facing this anxiety by displaying true faith, and by again, self-affirming oneself. We draw from the "power of being" which is God for Tillich and use that faith to in turn affirm ourselves and negate the non-being. We can find our meaning and purpose through the "power of being" (172-73).

Tillich writes that the ultimate source of the courage to be is the "God above God," which transcends the theistic idea of God and is the content of absolute faith (defined as "the accepting of the acceptance without somebody or something that accepts") (185).

#### **Popular works**

Two of Tillich's works, *The Courage to Be* (1952) and *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), were read widely, including by people who would not normally read religious books. In *The Courage to Be*, he lists three basic anxieties: anxiety about our biological finitude, i.e. that arising from the knowledge that we will eventually die; anxiety about our moral finitude, linked to guilt; and anxiety about our existential finitude, a sense of aimlessness in life. Tillich related these to three different historical eras: the early centuries of the Christian era; the Reformation; and the 20th century. Tillich's popular works have influenced psychology as well as theology, having had an influence on Rollo May, whose "The Courage to Create" was inspired by "The Courage to Be".

## Reception

Today, Tillich's most observable legacy may well be that of a spiritually-oriented public intellectual and teacher with a broad and continuing range of influence. Tillich's chapel sermons (especially at Union) were enthusiastically received [79] (Tillich was known as the only faculty member of his day at Union willing to attend the revivals of Billy Graham). [80] Tillich's students have commented on Tillich's approachability as a lecturer and his need for interaction with his audience. [81] When Tillich was University Professor at Harvard, he was chosen as keynote speaker from among an auspicious gathering of many who had appeared on the cover of Time Magazine during its first four decades. Tillich along with his student, psychologist Rollo May, was an early leader at the Esalen Institute. [82] Contemporary New Age catchphrases describing God (spatially) as the "Ground of Being" and (temporally) as the "Eternal Now," [83] in tandem with the view that God is not an entity among entities but rather is "Being-Itself"—notions which Eckhart Tolle, for example, has invoked repeatedly throughout his career [84]—were paradigmatically renovated by Tillich, although of course these ideas derive from Christian mystical sources as well as from ancient and medieval theologians such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. [85][86]

The introductory philosophy course taught by the person Tillich considered to be his best student, John Edwin Smith, "probably turned more undergraduates to the study of philosophy at Yale than all the other philosophy courses put together. His courses in philosophy of religion and American philosophy defined those fields for many years. Perhaps most important of all, he has educated a younger generation in the importance of the public life in philosophy and in how to practice philosophy publicly." In the 1980s and 1990s the Boston University Institute for Philosophy and Religion, a leading forum dedicated to the revival of the American public tradition of philosophy and religion, flourished under the leadership of Tillich's student and expositor Leroy S. Rouner. A consideration of Tillich's own traumatic experiences as an active duty chaplain during World War I have recently led some to view his theology as "Post-traumatic." The book Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back explores Tillich's experiences and theology in order to offer people afflicted with post-traumatic stress an understanding of God aimed at helping them heal. [88]

#### Criticism

<u>Martin Buber</u>'s disciple <u>Malcolm Diamond</u> claims Tillich's approach indicates a "<u>transtheistic</u> position that Buber seeks to avoid", reducing God to the impersonal "necessary being" of <u>Thomas Aquinas.</u>

Tillich has been criticized from the <u>Barthian</u> wing of <u>Protestantism</u> for what is alleged to be correlation theory's tendency to reduce God and his relationship to man to <u>anthropocentric</u> terms. Tillich counters that Barth's <u>approach</u> to theology denies the "possibility of understanding God's relation to man in any other way than heteronomously or extrinsically". [90] Defenders of Tillich claim that critics misunderstand the distinction Tillich makes between God's essence as the unconditional ("das unbedingte") "Ground of Being" which is unknowable, and how God reveals himself to mankind in existence. [91] Tillich establishes the distinction in the first chapter of his *Systematic Theology Volume One*: "But though God in his abysmal nature [footnote: 'Calvin: in his essence'] is in no way dependent on man, God in his self manifestation to man is dependent on the way man receives his manifestation." [56]

Some conservative strains of Evangelical Christianity believe Tillich's thought is too unorthodox to qualify as Christianity at all, but rather as a form of <u>pantheism</u> or <u>atheism. [92]</u> The <u>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</u> states, "At best Tillich was a pantheist, but his thought borders on atheism." [93] Defenders of Tillich counter such claims by pointing to clear monotheistic articulations, from a classical Christian viewpoint, of the relationship between God and man, such as his description of the experience of grace in his sermon "You Are Accepted". [94]

## Works

- Tillich, Paul (1912), Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling's Philosophical Development, Bucknell University Press (published 1974), ISBN 978-0-83871493-5
- (1956) [1925, Die religiöse Lage der Gegenwart, Holt 1932], The Religious Situation (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126182103/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=376), Meridian Press, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=376) on 2005-11-26.
- (c. 1977) [1933, Die Sozialistische Entscheidung; Alfred Protte, Potsdam 1933; new edition: Medusa, Berlin, 1980], The Socialist Decision, New York: Harper & Row.
- (1936), The Interpretation of History (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126182128/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=377), archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=377) on 2005-11-26.
- (1948), The Protestant Era (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126182248/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=380), The University of Chicago Press, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=380) on 2005-11-26.
- 6 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  5 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  5 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  4 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  4 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  7 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  7 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  7 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  7 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800
  8 Tillich-MainWorks-Hamptwerke 800

A set of Paul Tillich's *Main Works Hauptwerke*.

- (1948), The Shaking of the Foundations (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126182155/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=378) (sermon collection), Charles Scribner's Sons, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=378) on 2005-11-26.
- (1951–1963). Systematic Theology (in 3 volumes). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
  - (1951), Systematic Theology (https://books.google.com/books?id=Wlyz0mYxAwkC), 1, ISBN 978-0-22680337-1.
  - (1957), <u>Systematic Theology</u> (https://books.google.com/books?id=MTsMPVv5QR8C), 2: Existence and the Christ, <u>ISBN</u> 978-0-22680338-8.
  - (1963), Systematic Theology, 3: Life and the Spirit: History and the Kingdom of God, ISBN 978-0-22680339-5
- (1952), The Courage to Be (https://books.google.com/books?id=WEz3kAHzMrEC), Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0-30017002-3.
- (1954), Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications (https://books.google.com/books?id=VplyyyOe3K8C),
   Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19500222-5
- (1955), Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality (https://books.google.com/books?id=jgYZOmCpbl0C), University Of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0-22680341-8
- (2006) [1955, Charles Scribner's Sons], The New Being (https://books.google.com/books?id=peUcgX\_VMAQC) (sermon collection), introd. by Mary Ann Stenger, Bison Press, ISBN 978-0-80329458-5, Religion online (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126182030/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=375).
- (1957), Dynamics of Faith (https://books.google.com/books?id=aA7EuFYk6UMC), Harper & Row, ISBN 978-0-06203146-4
- (1959), Theology of Culture (https://books.google.com/books?id=BsiJbOR6AGoC), Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19976353-5
- (1963), Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126185238/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1557), Columbia University Press, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1557) on 2005-11-26.
- (1995) [1963, Harper & Row], Morality and Beyond (https://books.google.com/books?id=c\_JtUlsewbYC), Westminster John Knox Press, ISBN 978-0-664-25564-0.
- (2003) [1963, Charles Scribner's Sons], The Eternal Now (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126185932/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1630) (university sermons 1955–63), SCM Press, ISBN 0-334-02875-2, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1630) on 2005-11-26.
- (1965), Brown, D. Mackenzie (ed.), Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126181109/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=538), Harper & Row, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=538) on 2005-11-26.
- (1966). The Future of Religions. New York: Charles Scribner's.
  - (1976) [1966], Brauer, Jerald C. (ed.), The Future of Religions (posthumous; includes autobiographical chapter), Harper & Row, ISBN 0060682477.

- (1966). On the Boundary (https://archive.org/details/onboundaryautobi0000till). New York: Charles Scribner's.
- (1984) [1967], Anshen, Ruth Nanda (ed.), My Search for Absolutes (https://web.archive.org/web/20051126185908/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1628) (posthumous; includes autobiographical chapter), Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-50585-8, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1628) on 2005-11-26
- (1969). Adams, James Luther (ed.). What Is Religion?. New York: Harper & Row.
- (1970), Brauer, J.C (ed.), My Travel Diary 1936: Between Two Worlds (https://web.archive.org/web/20060622082710/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=3181), Harper & Row, archived from the original (http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=3181) on 2006-06-22
- (1972), Braaten, Carl Edward (ed.), A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism (https://books.google.com/books?id=LvsBjzLYo0lC), Simon & Schuster, ISBN 978-0-67121426-5 (edited from his lectures and published posthumously).
  - A History of Christian Thought (https://web.archive.org/web/20060106105318/http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=2310)
     (1968), Harper & Row, contains the first part of the two part 1972 edition (comprising the 38 New York lectures).
- (1981) [German, 1923], The System of the Sciences According to Objects and Methods (https://books.google.com/books?id=apXAvr8SODcC), Paul Wiebe transl., London: Bucknell University Press, ISBN 978-0-83875013-1.
- (1999), Church, F. Forrester (ed.), <u>The Essential Tillich (https://books.google.com/books?id=NhsrRclfFbYC)</u> (anthology), U. of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0-22680343-2

## See also

- Philosophical theology
- Christian existentialism
- Systematic theology
- List of American philosophers
- Neo-orthodoxy
- Panentheism
- Postmodern Christianity
- Theistic Personalism

#### References

- Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 3, University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 245
- 2. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 235
- 3. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 92, 120
- 4. "Autonomy and heteronomy are rooted in theonomy, and each goes astray when their theonomous unity is broken. Theonomy does not mean the acceptance of a divine law imposed on reason by a highest authority; it means autonomous reason united with its own depth. In a theonomous situation reason actualizes itself in obedience to its structural laws and in the power of its own inexhaustible ground." Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 85
- 5. Peters, Ted (1995), Braaten, Carl E (ed.), A map of twentieth-century theology: readings from Karl Barth to radical pluralism (https://books.google.com/books?id=Xax15MpLyjYC&lpg=PA392) (review), Fortress Press, backjacket, ISBN 9781451404814, retrieved 2011-01-01, "The current generation of students has heard only the names of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and the Niehuhrs"
- Bowker, John, ed. (2000), "Tillich, Paul Johannes Oskar", The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press.
- 7. "Tillich, Paul", *Encyclopædia Britannica* (http://search.eb.com/eb/artic le-7265) (online ed.), 2008, retrieved 17 February 2008.
- 8. Tillich, My Search for Absolutes, 245
- 9. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, review included on back cover of *Systematic Theology*, *Vol.* 3
- 10. John H. Randall, Jr., *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, review included on back cover of *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*
- 11. "Paul Tillich Resources" (http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/tillich/resources/influence\_schelling.htm). people.bu.edu. Retrieved 2020-07-21.
- 12. Gesamtverzeichnis des Wingolf, Lichtenberg, 1991.
- 13. Pauck et al.
- 14. Pauck
- 15. "Paul Tillich, Lover" (http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,917 1,908007-1,00.html), *Time*, October 8, 1973.
- 16. Wolfgang Saxon (October 30, 1988), "Hannah Tillich, 92, Christian Theologian's Widow", *New York Times*
- Woodson, Hue (2018), Heideggerian Theologies: The Pathmarks of John Macquarrie, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, p. 94-107, ISBN 978-1-53264775-8
- 18. O'Meara, Thomas (2006), "Paul Tillich and Erich Przywara at Davos", *Gregorianum*, **87**: 227–38.

- 19. Pauck, Wilhelm & Marion 1976.
- 20. Tillich 1964, p. 16.
- Stone, Ronald H. (1992-01-01), Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A
   Mentor to the Twentieth Century (https://books.google.com/books?id=
   ypy5Uz4qm5YC&pg=PA115), Westminster John Knox Press, p. 115,
   ISBN 978-0-664-25390-5, retrieved 2016-03-14
- 22. Pauck, Wilhelm & Marion 1976, p. 225.
- 23. "University Professorships." *About the Faculty* (https://www.harvard.e du/about-harvard/harvard-glance/about-faculty/university-professorships). Harvard University
- 24. Williams, George Hunston, *Divinings: Religion At Harvard*, **2**, pp. 424 f
- 25. http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19590316,00.html
- Meyer, Betty H. (2003). The ARC story: a narrative account of the Society for the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture. New York: Association for Religion and Intellectual Life. <u>ISBN</u> 978-0-97470130-<u>1</u>.
- 27. Kegley & Bretall 1964, pp. ix-x.
- 28. "Dr. Paul Tillich, Outstanding Protestant Theologian", *The Times*, 25 Oct 1965
- 29. Thomas, John Heywood (2002), *Tillich* (https://archive.org/details/tillichoutstandi00john), Continuum, ISBN 0-8264-5082-2.
- 30. The development of Tillich's intellectual profile happened in a context in which the fundamental ontology of Martin Heidegger was also taking shape. The relation of Tillich's understanding of being to Heidegger's reflection on the question of being (Seinsfrage) in Sein und Zeit (Being and Time) has received little scholarly attention. A recent account has been published in Nader El-Bizri, 'Ontological Meditations on Tillich and Heidegger', Iris: Annales de Philosophie Volume 36 (2015), pp. 109-114 (a peer-reviewed journal published by the Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut)
- 31. <u>Tillich 1957</u>, p. 11.
- 32. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 163
- 33. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 164
- 34. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 164-186
- 35. Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 165
- 36. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 165
- 37. Tillich 1957, p. 10.
- 38. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, pp. 235-6
- 39. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 236
- 40. Voegelin, Eric, Conversations with Eric Voegelin, p. 51
- 41. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, pp. 168, 189

- 42. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 191
- 43. Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1955, 21-62.
- 44. The Courage to Be, Yale: New Haven, 2000, 184.
- 45. The Courage to Be, Yale: New Haven, 2000, 187.
- 46. J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, HarperCollins: New York, 1978, 128
- 47. Lamm, Julia, "'Catholic Substance' Revisited: Reversals of Expectation in Tillich's Doctrine of God", in Raymond F. Bulman; Frederick J. Parrella (eds.), Paul Tillich: A New Catholic Assessment, p. 54
- 48. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, p. 211
- 49. Tillich, Courage To Be, p 184.
- 50. The Courage to Be, Yale: New Haven, 2000, 190.
- 51. Tillich, Courage To Be, p 185.
- 52. Tillich, Systematic Theology vol. 1, p. 271
- 53. Tillich, Systematic Theology vol. 1, p. 272
- 54. Tillich, Theology of Culture, p 15.
- 55. Tillich, Theology of Culture, p 127-132.
- 56. Tillich 1951, p. 61.
- 57. Tillich 1951, p. 64.
- 58. Tillich 1955, pp. 11-20.
- 59. Tillich 1957, p. 23
- 60. Tillich 1952, pp. 58ff.
- 61. Tillich 1951, p. 28.
- 62. McKelway 1964, p. 47.
- 63. Tillich 1951, p. 47.
- 64. Tillich 1951, p. 40.
- 65. Tillich 1951, p. 35.
- 66. McKelway 1964, pp. 55-56.
- 67. Tillich 1951, p. 52
- 68. McKelway 1964, p. 80.
- 69. Tillich 1951, p. 50.
- 70. Tillich 1951, p. 60.
- 71. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, p. 4
- 72. The Courage to Be, page 182
- 73. Wainwright, William (2010-09-29), "Concepts of God" (http://plato.sta nford.edu/entries/concepts-god/), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, retrieved 2011-01-01
- 74. Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 1-2
- 75. Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 5
- 76. Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 8-9
- 77. Tillich Interview part 12 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR7QAj m3yxU) on YouTube
- 78. Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 52
- 79. Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson (1993). 20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age (https://books.google.com/books?id=bj9cJHj3vUwC). Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press. p. 116. ISBN 978-0830815258.
- 80. According to Leroy Rouner, in conversation, 1981.
- 81. Bunge, Nancy. "From Hume to Tillich: Teaching Faith & Benevolence" (http://philosophynow.org/issues/38/From\_Hume\_to\_T illich\_Teaching\_Faith\_and\_Benevolence). Philosophy Now. Philosophy Now. Retrieved 30 December 2012. "As a former student, I can attest that he invited students to leave questions on the podium and he would invariably open the lecture by responding to them, often in a way that startled the student by revealing what a profound question he or she had asked."

- 82. Anderson, Walter Truett (2004). *The Upstart Spring: Esalen and the Human Potential Movement: The First Twenty Years* (https://books.google.com/books?id=\_pOl3\_rrr18C). Lincoln NE: iUniverse. p. 104. ISBN 978-0595307357.
- 83. "There is no present in the mere stream of time; but the present is real, as our experience witnesses. And it is real because eternity breaks into time and gives it a real present. We could not even say now, if eternity did not elevate that moment above the ever-passing time. Eternity is always present; and its presence is the cause of our having the present at all. When the psalmist looks at God, for Whom a thousand years are like one day, he is looking at that eternity which alone gives him a place on which he can stand, a now which has infinite reality and infinite significance. In every moment that we say now, something temporal and something eternal are united. Whenever a human being says, "Now I am living; now I am really present," resisting the stream which drives the future into the past, eternity is. In each such Now eternity is made manifest; in every real now, eternity is present." (Tillich, "The Mystery of Time," in *The Shaking of the Foundations*).
- 84. In his September 2010 Live Meditation (https://www.eckharttolletv.com/), e.g., Tolle expounds at length on "the dimension of depth".
- 85. Cary, Phillip (2012). "Augustinian Compatibilism and the Doctrine of Election", in Augustine and Philosophy, ed. by Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (https://books.google.com/books?id=vAw\_jBr38m8C). Lanham MD: Lexington Books. p. 91. ISBN 978-0739145388.
- 86. Both Augustine and later **Boethius** used the concept of the "eternal now" to investigate the relationship between divine omnipotence and omniscience and the temporality of human free will; and Thomas Aquinas' synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies with Christian theology included the concepts of God as the "ground of being" and "being-itself" (*ipsum esse*).
- 87. The Chronicle of Higher Education (Jan. 24, 2010)
- 88. Peters, David Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back, Church Publishing. <a href="https://www.churchpublishing.org/posttraumaticgod">https://www.churchpublishing.org/posttraumaticgod</a>
- 89. Novak, David (Spring 1992), "Buber and Tillich" (https://books.google.com/books?id=xnXMiBAXVZkC&pg=PA89), Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 29 (2): 159–74, ISBN 9780802828422, as reprinted in Novak, David (2005), Talking With Christians: Musings of A Jewish Theologian, Wm. B. Eerdmans, p. 101.
- Dourley, John P. (1975), Paul Tillich and Bonaventure: An Evaluation of Tillich's Claim to Stand in the Augustinian-Franciscan Tradition (htt ps://books.google.com/books?id=38YUAAAAIAAJ&lpg=PA12), Brill Archive, p. 12, ISBN 978-900404266-7
- Boozer, Jack Stewart (1952), The place of reason in Paul Tillich's concept of God (http://open.bu.edu/xmlui/handle/2144/5096) (dissertation), Boston University, p. 269
- 92. Tillich held an equally low opinion of biblical literalism. See (Tillich 1951, p. 3): 'When fundamentalism is combined with an antitheological bias, as it is, for instance, in its biblicistic-evangelical form, the theological truth of yesterday is defended as an unchangeable message against the theological truth of today and tomorrow. Fundamentalism fails to make contact with the present situation, not because it speaks from beyond every situation, but because it speaks from a situation from the past. It elevates something finite and transitory to infinite and eternal validity. In this respect fundamentalism has demonic traits.'
- 93. Gundry, SN (May 2001), "Death of God Theology" (http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/deathgod.htm), in Elwell, Walter A (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ISBN 978-0-8010-2075-9, retrieved
- 94. Paul Tillich. "You Are Accepted" (http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/383693/9154847/1288214160857/You+Are+Accepted.pdf?token=mmJyuzBDmlbCfQtBymnnJTAQ1EI%3D) (PDF).

## **Further reading**

- Adams, James Luther. 1965. Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Culture, Science, and Religion. New York: New York University Press
- Armbruster, Carl J. 1967. The Vision of Paul Tillich. New York: Sheed and Ward
- Breisach, Ernst. 1962. Introduction to Modern Existentialism. New York: Grove Press
- Bruns, Katja (2011), "Anthropologie zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft bei Paul Tillich und Kurt Goldstein. Historische Grundlagen und systematische Perspektiven", Kontexte. Neue Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Theologie (in German), Goettingen: Ruprecht, 41, ISBN 978-3-7675-7143-3.
- Bulman, Raymond F. and Frederick J. Parrella, eds. 1994. Paul Tillich: A New Catholic Assessment. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press
- Carey, Patrick W., and Lienhard, Joseph. 2002. "Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians". Mass: Hendrickson
- Dourley, John P. 2008. Paul Tillich, <u>Carl Jung</u>, and the Recovery of Religion. London: Routledge

- Ford, Lewis S. 1966. "Tillich and Thomas: The Analogy of Being." Journal of Religion 46:2 (April)
- Freeman, David H. 1962. Tillich. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.
- Gilkey, Langdon. 1990. Gilkey on Tillich. New York: Crossroad
- Grenz, Stanley, and Olson, Roger E. 1997. 20th Century Theology God & the World in a Transitional Age
- Hamilton, Kenneth. 1963. The System and the Gospel: A Critique of Paul Tillich. New York: Macmillan
- Hammond, Guyton B. 1965. Estrangement: A Comparison of the Thought of Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1967. The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. With intro. J. B. Baillie, Torchbook intro. by George Lichtheim. New York: Harper Torchbooks
- Hook, Sidney, ed. 1961 Religious Experience and Truth: A Symposium (New York: New York University Press)
- Hopper, David. 1968. Tillich: A Theological Portrait. Philadelphia: Lippincott
- Howlett, Duncan. 1964. The Fourth American Faith. New York: Harper & Row
- Kaufman, Walter (1961a), The Faith of a Heretic, New York: Doubleday.
- (1961b), Critique of Religion and Philosophy, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday.
- Kegley, Charles W; Bretall, Robert W, eds. (1964), The Theology of Paul Tillich, New York: Macmillan.
- Keefe, Donald J., S.J. 1971. Thomism and the Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich. Leiden: E.J. Brill
- Kelsey, David H. 1967 The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Lata, Jan Adrian (1995), Odpowiadająca teologia Paula Tillicha (in Polish), Signum, Oleśnica: Oficyna Wydaw, ISBN 83-85631-38-0.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1963. "God and the Theologians," Encounter 21:3 (September)
- Martin, Bernard. 1963. The Existentialist Theology of Paul Tillich. New Haven: College and University Press
- Marx, Karl. n.d. Capital. Ed. Frederick Engels. trans. from 3rd German ed. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: The Modern Library
- May, Rollo. 1973. Paulus: Reminiscences of a Friendship. New York: Harper & Row
- McKelway, Alexander J (1964), The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich: A Review and Analysis, Richmond: John Knox Press.
- Modras, Ronald. 1976. Paul Tillich 's Theology of the Church: A Catholic Appraisal. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976.
- O'Meara, Thomas F., O.P. and Donald M. Weisser, O.P., eds. 1969. Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought. Garden City: Image Books
- Palmer, Michael. 1984. Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art. New York: Walter de Gruyter
- Pauck; Wilhelm; Marion (1976), Paul Tillich: His Life & Thought, 1: Life, New York: Harper & Row.
- Re Manning, Russell, ed. 2009. The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Re Manning, Russell, ed. 2015. Retrieving the Radical Tillich. His Legacy and Contemporary Importance. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Rowe, William L. 1968. Religious Symbols and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Scharlemann, Robert P. 1969. Reflection and Doubt in the Thought of Paul Tillich. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Schweitzer, Albert. 1961. The Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery. New York: Macmillan
- Soper, David Wesley. 1952. Major Voices in American Theology: Six Contemporary Leaders Philadelphia: Westminster
- Tavard, George H. 1962. Paul Tillich and the Christian Message. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons
- Taylor, Mark Kline, ed. (1991), *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (https://books.google.com/books?id=OfCIHSBP65EC), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, ISBN 978-1-45141386-1
- Thomas, George F (1965), Religious Philosophies of the West, New York: Scribner's.
- Thomas, J. Heywood (1963), Paul Tillich: An Appraisal, Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Tillich, Hannah. 1973. From Time to Time. New York: Stein and Day
- Vîrtop Sorin-Avram: "Integrating the symbol approach in education " in Conference Proceedings 2, Economic, Social and Administrative Approaches to the knowledge based organisation, « Nicolae Bălcescu » Land Forces Academy Publishing House, Sibiu, Romania, 2013. ISSN 1843-6722 pag. 454-459, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318724749\_1\_Virtop\_Sorin-Avram\_Integrating\_the\_symbol\_approach\_in\_education\_in\_Conference\_Procedings\_2\_Economic\_Social\_and\_Administrative\_Approaches\_to
- Tucker, Robert. 1961. Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Wheat, Leonard F. 1970. Paul Tillich's Dialectical Humanism: Unmasking the God above God. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press
- Woodson, Hue. 2018. Heideggerian Theologies: The Pathmarks of John Macquarrie, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner. Eugene: Wipf and Stock

#### **External links**

- The Andover-Harvard Theological Library at Harvard Divinity School holds the papers of Paul Tillich and Hannah Tillich.
  - "A Conversation With Dr. Paul Tillich and Werner Rode, Graduate Student in Theology." (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div00621) Film reel. 1956.
  - Tillich, Paul, 1886—1965. Audiocassettes, 1955–1965 (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div00651)
  - Tillich, Paul, 1886—1965. Papers, 1894–1974 (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div00649)
  - Tillich, Paul, 1886—1965, collector. Literature about Paul Tillich, 1911–1994 (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div00722)
  - Tillich, Hannah. Papers, 1896–1976 (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div00721)
- Works by or about Paul Tillich (https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28%28subject%3A%22Tillich%2C%20Paul%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Paul%20Tillich%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Tillich%2C%20Paul%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Paul%20Tillich%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Tillich%2C%20Paul%22%20OR%20treator%3A%22Tillich%2C%20Px22%20OR%20trle%3A%22Paul%20Tillich%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Tillich%2C%20Paul%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Paul%20Tillich%22%29%20OR%20%28%221886-1965%22%20AND%20Tillich%29%29%20AND%20%28-me diatype:software%29) at Internet Archive
- James Rosati's sculpture of Tillich's head (http://faculty.evansville.edu/ck6/bstud/tillich.jpg) in the Paul Tillich Park in New Harmony, Indiana.
- North American Paul Tillich Society (http://www.napts.org/).
- James Wu. "Paul Tillich (1886–1965)" (http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/tillich.htm). Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology.
- Tillich Park Finger Labyrinth (https://web.archive.org/web/20110910150604/http://www.billressl.us/tillichparklabyrinth.pdf) (PDF), archived from the original (http://www.billressl.us/tillichparklabyrinth.pdf) (PDF) on 2011-09-10, retrieved 2010-01-28. Walk Tillich Park while discerning Tillich's theology. Created by Rev. Bill Ressl after an inspirational walk in Tillich Park in New Harmony, Indiana.
- Tillich profile, and synopsis (http://www.giffordlectures.org/Author.asp?AuthorID=169) of Gifford Lectures

#### $Retrieved \ from \ "\underline{https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Paul\_Tillich\&oldid=1008145872" \ and \ an alternative and \ an alter$

This page was last edited on 21 February 2021, at 20:21 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.



## Intersubjectivity and Reciprocal Causality within Contemporary Understanding of the God-World Relationship

Thomas F. O'Meara\*

## The Dignity of Being a Cause

https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2018-0013 Received November 8, 2017; accepted February 13, 2018

**Abstract:** Theologians, philosophers, and scientists have pondered the causalities of human beings, nature, and cosmos. This seeks to avoid the reduction of all activity to God and to understand the richness of beings other than God. Thomas Aquinas valued this "secondary causality" greatly, while recent thinkers are also advocating its importance again.

Keywords: causality; Thomas Aquinas

The following pages ponder the reality of causality, the nature and independence of developments and interplays on Earth and in a wider cosmos. Philosophy and science have long analyzed different kinds of causalities. Nonetheless, the independence of finite causes and the often projected sovereignty of the divine raise both popular and theoretical issues. Past thinkers and contemporary discussions address them.

Beings are endowed with capabilities and powers leading to action and production. A being's causal endowments can bring about remarkable effects like producing honey or giving birth to a baby whale. Fields ranging from astrophysics to theology study these multiple kinds of interaction. William Stoeger, S.J., writes of the importance of considering causality in light of the new directions in scientific fields about deeper levels of being and life. "Over the past century there has been an explosion of knowledge and understanding about all aspects of nature and of the vast universe of which we are a part. Along with the emerging details of physics, chemistry, biochemistry, and biology from focused scientific research has come a more refined awareness of the many different intricately related factors, 'causes,' that are at work in nature and in the universe." Evolution and complexity on Earth and in its universe suggest considering today not a defense of the reality of cause and effect but their modalities and breadth.

The human interpretation of causality – ranging from composing music to a nebula generating stars – has a history. John Haught observes a shift in the interpretation of intersecting forces. "As long as the cosmological background of evolutionary science is taken to be the necessity-ridden, inertial, and linear world of classical physical laws the contingent emergence of life will appear impossibly difficult and improbable." Science, however, is granting to physical reality "an open readiness for dramatic, irreversible, and creative transformations that take less time, and make the emergence and evolution of life much more likely." Examples of adaptive, self-organizing, informationally rich systems in non-human nature and human culture include cells, brains, immune systems, ecosystems, economic systems, and religions. Nature at both the atomic and galactic level has a "propensity to branch out into self-organizing patterns...beyond the pale of what can be subjected to rigid, deterministic, or a priori analysis." Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> Stoeger, "Cosmology, Evolution, Causality and Creation," 247. A dynamic of birth and absorption, of gathering and clustering reaches through the galaxies; see Dorminey, "What Galaxy Superclusters Tell Us about the Universe"; O'Meara, "Community as Primary Reality."

<sup>2</sup> Haught, "Chaos, Complexity and Theology," 192.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author: Thomas F. O'Meara, University of Notre Dame, United States of America; E-mail: tomeara@nd.edu

patterns and forces in the universe have a variety and reality not yet clearly seen. This sets aside picturing its Source as residing at the top of a hierarchy or as a powerful Mover at the edge of constellations. The following reflections on causes touch on the past and the present, person and cosmos, science and religion.

### 1 Thomas Aquinas and the greatness of causality

In a theological metaphysics, Thomas Aquinas singled out being a cause as a most important endowment of any reality. There is only one ultimate or "primary cause," God. Other beings are "secondary causes." They are not marionettes: they are real agents acting out of their species' forms to fashion being and life. Through a "proper causality" newly born gorillas are directly and formally caused by their parents, while indirectly bananas, sunlight, and oxygen contribute to their growth.

Beings acting out of their natures do not detract from their ultimate source considered to be the sole, primary cause of all. The medieval professor observed that the ultimate causality is so powerful and complex that it can permit creatures to act in their own ways. "It is not out of God's incompleteness or weakness that he gives to creatures causal power but out of a perfect fullness that is quite capable of sharing itself with all." The causal reality of being – of every being – is a power, a gift, a dignity. "On account of the abundance of his goodness (and not at all as a defect in power) God communicates to creatures the dignity of causality." The universe unfolds from and through the effects of these proper, proximate causes. Thus the activity of God is not the proximate cause of most things. Through the mediation of suitably adapted causes "the divine will prearranges a mode for things from the arrangement of its wisdom." Ordinary investigation can find the factors which influenced a car being hit by a truck or the production of a calf by a cow. Who causes eagles? Other eagles feeding and training young eagles. The causalities of creatures are the executors of divine plans.

The extraordinary causality of an ultimate Reality need not detract from other causalities. To ignore the distinction between primary and secondary causes is to replace God by a creature or to replace the creature by God. God is not the only cause in the universe, and beings are not merely accidental impetuses or minor backgrounds. For Aquinas "it is clear that a single effect is not attributed to its natural cause and to God as if one part was from God and the other from the natural agent: it is totally from both but differently." God subtly furthers being and life in a network of proper activity and complex self-organization. In the line of Aquinas (and Meister Eckhart) John Haught continues: "If God is to create a world truly distinct from the divine being, then such a world would have to possess an *internal* self-coherence or autonomy, simply in order to be distinct from God. Divine creation may perhaps be understood as a 'letting' of the world." He withholds too direct exercises of omnipotence and withdraws intrusive forms of his presence. "The universe that is then called into being by God would be not only an expression of divine might but just as fundamentally the product of divine humility." Traditional aspects like God's infinity or omnipresence are not the dominant facets of one large power overshadowing other realities but they are aspects of infinite activity and extensive permission. <sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* q. 10, ad 16. One recalls a phrase from John Damascene in the seventh century cited by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth: the divine is an infinite ocean of reality (*Summa theologiae I*, q. 13, a. 11, citing John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 29).

<sup>6 &</sup>quot;...dignitatem causalitatis etiam creaturis communicet" (Summa theologiae I, q. 22, a. 3).

<sup>7</sup> De Veritate, q. 23, a. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Summa contra Gentiles III, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Haught, "Chaos, Complexity and Theology"; Fabel and John, Teilhard in the 21st Century, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Haught, "Chaos, Complexity and Theology," 193.

<sup>11</sup> The medieval metaphysical principle that the Creator sustains constantly the being and activity of every creature expresses a quite different contact between creator and creature than that of the proper secondary causal world. "God is therefore necessarily in things as the cause and maintainer of their being. This maintenance means maintaining the possibility and actualization of being a cause so that God as the ground of being 'immediate in omnibus agit.' This being-in of the first mover in all that is active is the effective permanence of the primary cause in the secondary causes" (Beuttler, *Gott und Raum – Theologie der Weltgegenwart Gottes*, 105).

### 2 Causalities in ordinary life and religion

The world includes natures with their forms, limitations, and development, although that range of necessities and contingencies is initially willed by the first cause. <sup>12</sup> Created and infinite causalities are not in opposition to each other; nor are they aiming at a replacement of one by the other. The primary cause is not glorified by interfering in the course of its creation. God is helped by creatures in as much as they accomplish what are his designs. <sup>13</sup> The divine presence is not theatrical and monopolizing. Credit belongs to the creature as well as to the creator.

God could alter the capabilities of a species in ways unsuited to that species – for instance, make a donkey fly – but he does not do that. Does this curtail God's power? Aquinas observed that the basic structures of nature set down by God through his freely chosen plans for creation do subsequently put limitations on him. <sup>14</sup> These limits come not from any weaknesses in his omnipotence but from the lack of some reality's feasibility. Causal beings are a central part of divine providence for the universe.

Some viewpoints frequently join ordinary causality to the intervention of a transcendent being. For instance, sports are for the recreation of those playing them and for fans who watch the contests. Success in sports results from the physical talent, quickness, and strength that lie within these men and women. A viewer soon notices a boxer or a kicker praying for divine assistance or a basketball player falling to his knees to thank the Almighty for his successful shot. There is no reason, psychological or theological, to think that God intervenes in athletic games. If an outside higher power assisted this one player or that one team, then the reality of the game would be vitiated. Like sports, the achievements of artists – in music and in the other arts like acting, painting, and writing – come from the talents of the artist inherited from parents and developed by teachers. In a concert God does not intervene for a few minutes to bestow a high soprano range or implant in fingers a sudden dexterity on the pipe organ. What has just been said of athletic and artistic performances is true of intellectual activities. Neglecting study and avoiding personal preparation for examinations cannot be remedied by narcotic stimulants or prayer.

An appreciation of secondary causality challenges some popular religious ideas and practices that expect automatic success from rituals and prayers. Do not venerable words like omnipotent and all-powerful indicate that God is the mover of everything? Here some faithful enthusiastically replace human accomplishments with divine activity, working to exalt the divine by viewing it as easily miraculous. Is not God always at hand to cure diseases, end droughts, or pass academic exams? An empirical view of secondary causality challenges easy effects caused supernaturally to enhance human performance or to remove illness. Prayers, blessed objects, places of pilgrimage do not have automatic effects in medicine or business. Created causality is an opponent of what underlies every fundamentalism.

### 3 Causality as violent

Causality enables growth, perhaps into future worlds and civilizations. However, science fiction in films and television too often presents worlds outside of Earth as violent. Even essays in scientific journals appear to find evil normal. The language of popular and academic astrophysics is not infrequently violent. Equipped with violent armaments and intent on conquest messianic figures appear. Alliances of galaxies employ imaginary, advanced technologies and make warfare exciting.

In a violent world the cosmos acts in frightening ways. Galaxies "gobble up" each other. When stars emit "fierce" gasses, the effect is "devastating." When after millions of years a star's fuel is exhausted, it

**<sup>12</sup>** See Hislop, "Introduction"; Stoeckele, *Gratia supponit natura*. In the phrase, "Grace does not destroy but perfects nature," one should note that "destroy" or "perfect" are not equivalent English words for the Latin terms. "Perfect" means reaching adequately the proper realization of a specific nature – with its limitations and lack of "perfection."

<sup>13</sup> Summa theologiae I, q. 23, a. 8, ad 2.

**<sup>14</sup>** *Summa theologiae* I, q. 25, a. 3. Albert the Great declared: "When I study nature, I do not expect to come upon miracles" (Albert the Great, *De generatione et corruptione* I, 1. 22).

"destroys" itself. Stars are "cannibalized" by a "monster" galaxy. Atoms and stars do contact each other in ways leading to fiery explosions. This is the result of the patterns and structures of the universe and seems to have as its goal the further expansion of the cosmos which would bring forth more planets, and so civilizations and culture. Cosmic processes and stages in the fiery lives of stars are simply in line with the evolutionary process of stars. The eventual falling apart of a comet is not really "suicide."

There is no need to think that evil is more prominent in the universe however widespread it is on Earth. Existence and intelligence are good, and evil is not their necessary companion. Perhaps in the universe of civilizations most creatures' free choices further life and order while enacting injury to others is rare. Even fiery causation is good; the end of a being contributes to further stages and worlds.

## 4 Recent theologians of causality

In the past century philosophers and theologians looked anew at created causality. After 1920 a Polish-German Jesuit Erich Przywara emphasized that "the developing stream of creatures" participates in existence and life through independent and interactive ways. The theologian saw participation in levels of being to be the structure of reality; causality was its vitalization. A dynamic of secondary causes, basic to the array of beings, had been highlighted by Christian theologians ranging from Thomas Aquinas to Ignatius Loyola. This is not surprising: causality has an incarnational structure. "Thomas Aquinas penetrated into reality in such a way that he distinguished between the all-reality and all-efficacy of God and the true proper reality and proper efficacy of creatures." Moreover, the capabilities of causes and their interplay could draw out of material and rational worlds the dynamics being pursued by modern philosophies and new sciences.

In the next generation, Karl Rahner pondered human causality through the approaches of modern philosophies of the active subject penetrated by history. Contrary to past static neo-scholastic chains of effects, he presented both the transcendental nature of the human being and the intimate self-giving of God as the sources of religious themes and activities. God, other than a highest being, was an atmosphere of sharing and love. Revelation and grace are terms for God's address, implicit and yet guided into explicit forms, expressing in men and women "the intimate being of God and God's free, personal relationship with spiritual creatures." The contact of divine causality with human actions had been after the Reformation a puzzling problematic challenging Protestant and Catholic theologians. Rahner saw it as a facet of a larger mystery: how can beings not just act freely but exist at all outside of the infinite? "The mystery of the relationship between the all-efficacious activity of God and the proper freedom of the creature is simply the application at the level of activity of the mystery of the co-existence of a finite being that really *is* – one that is different from God and yet before God affirms its own valid causality — with God." Here issues traditionally expressed in a limited mechanistic ontology were moving into new conceptualizations and expressions.

For Joseph Bracken science and religion need new ways of reflecting on divine activity. The universe should be seen as constituted not by individual entities in varying distances from one another but by dynamically ordered corporate entities. This calls for a theology of universal inter-subjectivity relating God to the cosmos in an ontology emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything. There is an embracing divine field of activities, and there is too the independent world that has slowly taken shape after the Big Bang fourteen billion years ago. Being holds within itself the dynamics and formats that tend to interaction. Created societies fit into an inter-subjective world that is constituted by a further dynamic, the interrelation of the divine persons who lead into the future a vast assembly of creatures. God is at work in the cosmos to achieve plans destined to appear far beyond contemporary thousands of solar

 $<sup>\</sup>textbf{15} \;\; \textbf{Sparrow, The Stargazer's Handbook} \; , \; \textbf{63, 121, 142, 211.}$ 

<sup>16</sup> Przywara, "Thomas und Hegel," 950, see "Katholischer Radikalismus."

<sup>17</sup> Przywara, "Zwischen Religion und Kultur," 98.

<sup>18</sup> Rahner, "Revelation."

<sup>19</sup> See Rahner, "Prädestination."

years as they unfold from the laws governing multiple evolutions and the freedom of intelligent beings. An ever-expanding cosmos of active forms is a panentheism marked by the triad of immanence, emergence, and transcendence. As God is community in action, the world is a structured society of sub-societies. That cosmos possess a proper autonomy before God.<sup>20</sup>

Michael Dodds sees realities and theories of causality being locked and unlocked by philosophy and science in their histories. Greek and medieval thinkers offered a rich account of causality, although subsequently modern Newtonian science reduced causality to one type: the force that moves the atoms. "The discussion of divine action ended in simple theories about that causality within or opposite to the notions of causality of modern science. Ultimately it seemed that God could not act in the world at all, for any act of God would interfere with the proper causality of creatures." Today, however, newer theories of the sciences do not reject wider views of causality. Some theories of quantum mechanics or an acceptance of the presence of design and indeterminism can encourage an expectation of God's free levels of activity in the universe. This gets beyond seeing God as a single, univocal cause and beyond expecting religion to be the advocate of a god active in mysteries or miracles. Alternative ways of thinking, old and new, maintain God's transcendence even as they affirm vital modes of presence and immanence among independent beings. Dodds' questions go beyond this sample of modern theologians to new kinds of inquiries concerning how God is the source of plan, freedom, and indeterminacy.<sup>22</sup>

#### 5 Conclusion

In recent decades the problem of causality has migrated from philosophy to physics. The universe has a range of causalities, and new scientific theories will give unexpected ways of conceiving of creation and Creator. Origin and time, power and efficacy, cause and ground point to a transcendent and richly seminal power. Stoeger sees what was called "primary causality" to be a "causality beyond causality."<sup>23</sup>

Material and physical contacts and results do not represent all there is to causality: for instance, in artistic and scientific creation, or in religion. There are influences on men and women that are not physical like heat but psychological and cultural. The human personality holds a receptivity for a range of subtle inspirations instructing and inspiring men and women. Silent alterations envelop someone arriving in a new city; the presence of one deeply loved or thoroughly feared is powerful. Mysticism and liturgy imply non-material modes. A different, invisible being who is infinite spirit and widely powerful need not have its effects limited to particles, gravity, and fire. It could influence those who have an intellect in ways other than through optical images or degrees of blood pressure.

There can be visible and invisible fields of causality with original structures and theories. The exploration of sub-atomic particles suggests interactions that are more than what was called by Greek and medieval philosophies the efficient cause; a variety of causalities would correspond to the diversity of charges and particles in matter. The projection of forces within dark matter may transcend our kinds of causality. The hypotheses of parallel worlds suggest remaining open to the unexpected.<sup>24</sup> Just the ever increasing number of galaxies, suns, and planets suggest further realms of interaction. Newly accessible galaxies and as yet unperceived forms awaiting discovery underlie not only astrophysics but community or music, religion and revelation.

**<sup>20</sup>** Bracken, "Panentheism: A Field-Oriented Approach," 217, 144, 58; see Bracken, "Being: An Entity, an Activity, or Both an Entity and an Activity?"; Bracken, *God. Three Who Are One*.

<sup>21</sup> Dodds, Unlocking Divine Action, 259.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 260; see Dodds, "Scientific Vetoes and the 'Hands-off' God: Divine Immanence, Quantum Mechanics, and the Search for a Better Way."

<sup>23</sup> Stoeger, "Cosmology, Evolution, Causality and Creation: The Limits, Compatibility and Cooperation of Scientific and Philosophical Methodologies."

<sup>24</sup> See Hafner and Valentin, Parallelwelten. Christliche Religion und die Vervielfachung von Wirklichkeiten.

#### References

Albert the Great. De generatione et corruptione.

Beuttler, Ulrich. Gott und Raum - Theologie der Weltgegenwart Gottes. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.

Bracken, Joseph. "Panentheism: A Field-Oriented Approach." In Philip Clayton, A. R. Peacocke, eds., *In whom we live and move and have our being: panentheistic reflections on God's presence in a scientific world*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004, 211-221.

Bracken, Joseph. "Being: An Entity, an Activity, or Both an Entity and an Activity?" *Journal of Religion* 96 (2016): 77-93. Bracken, Joseph. *God. Three Who Are One.* Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008.

Dodds, Michael J. *Unlocking Divine Action. Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas*. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012, 259-271.

Dodds, Michael J. "Scientific Vetoes and the 'Hands-off' God: Divine Immanence, Quantum Mechanics, and the Search for a Better Way," *Theology and Science* 10 (2012): 89-94.

Dorminey, Bruce. "What Galaxy Superclusters Tell Us about the Universe," Astronomy (January, 2010): 28-30.

Fabel, Arthur, Donald St. John, eds., Teilhard in the 21st Century. The Emerging Spirit of Earth. Maryknoll, N. Y.; Orbis Books, 2003.

Hafner, J. E., Valentin, J., eds. *Parallelwelten. Christliche Religion und die Vervielfachung von Wirklichkeiten.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. 2009.

Haught, John, F. "Chaos, Complexity and Theology." In Arthur Fabel, Donald St. John, eds., *Teilhard in the 21st Century. The Emerging Spirit of Earth.* Maryknoll, N. Y.; Orbis Books, 2003, 19-32.

John Damascene. De Fide Orthodoxa. In Migne, Patrologia Graeca 94.

Hislop, Ian. "Introduction." God's Will and Providence. In St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae 5. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967. xix-xxii.

O'Meara, Thomas. "Community as Primary Reality," Theological Studies 78 (2017): 435-446.

Przywara, Erich. "Thomas und Hegel." In *Ringen der Gegenwart: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1922-1927* 2. Augsburg: Filser, 1929, 940-952

Przywara, Erich. "Katholischer Radikalismus." In *Ringen der Gegenwart: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1922-1927* 1. Augsburg: Filser, 1929, 919-26.

Przywara, Erich. "Zwischen Religion und Kultur." In Weg zu Gott, Religionsphilosophische Schriften. Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1962.

Rahner, Karl. "Revelation," In Theological Dictionary, New York: Herder and Herder, 1965.

Rahner, Karl. "Prädestination." In Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche 8. Freiburg im Br.: Herder, 1963, 669.

Sparrow, Giles. The Stargazer's Handbook. London: Quercus, 2007.

Stoeckele, Bernhard. Gratia supponit natura. Zur Geschichte eines theologischen Axioms. Rome: Herder, 1962.

Stoeger, William R. "Cosmology, Evolution, Causality and Creation: The Limits, Compatibility and Cooperation of Scientific and Philosophical Methodologies." In George F. R. Ellis, Michael Heller, Tadeusz Pabjan, eds., *The Causal Universe*. Cracow: Copernicus Center Press, 2013, 247-268.

Thomas Aquinas. De Spiritualibus Creaturis.

Thomas Aquinas. Summa theologiae.

Thomas Aquinas. De Veritate.

Thomas Aquinas. Summa contra Gentiles.

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

# God is Being-Itself: Exploring Tillich's Concept of the Ultimate

#### Dr. T. Jamedi Longkumer

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Dimapur Government College, Oriental Colony, Dimapur - 797112, Nagaland, India

Abstract: This paper will probe into the philosophical locus of the concept of the ultimate concern as discussed by Paul Tillich in his substantial writings. It appears that the concept is to be situated in the problem concerning the attributes of God, in particular, God's infinitude. The idea of the infinitude puts us on guard not to predicate of God anything, including 'existence', for that would be limiting the unlimited. This is one specific problem with which philosophers have grappled with. Can we say, 'God exists?' Some say, we can, what is more, we can adduce arguments for God's existence. Others say that we cannot and they too adduce arguments for God's non-existence. Tillich belongs to the latter group, but without being an atheist. This insight of Tillich is the study-focus of this paper. Apart from the question, if existence is a predicate, his answer here has a deep significance to analytical and language philosophy. Tillich believes that the question of God can neither be asked nor answered. Hence the answer, too, be it the affirmation or the negation, implicitly negates the nature of God. Paradoxically, for Tillich, both the affirmation and negation of God constitute forms of atheism.

**Keywords:** Being-itself, Existence, Transcendence, Theism, Atheism

#### 1. Introduction

For Tillich the statements, 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' mean the same thing, namely, the irrelevance of the question of God's existence. The two statements, one tends to think, constitute theism and atheism respectively. Tillich, however, argues that not only the denial of God, but also the affirmation would amount to the repudiation of the infinitude of God. The question therefore is not whether the term, 'God', refers to any reality. Rather, if the reality, to which the term refers, is like any other finite realities that we encounter. Its ultimacy refers, not to its being the first or to its being the highest, but to its being the ground or the source of all beings. Tillich, in stating that 'God does not exist', is only restricting the use of the word 'existence' to the finite world, at once safeguarding thereby God's unique nature. This is Tillich's novel way of reinstating the Scholastic thesis that one cannot say that the creator and the creature exist in the same univocal sense. This line of thought is explored in this paper and the discussion pivots around two crucial issues. Firstly, the reason why Tillich asserts that the concept of existence is incompatible with the concept of God as the ultimate concern has to be critically examined. Tillich's statement, 'God does not exist', is liable to be misunderstood in more than one way. Hence it is to be explicated with reference to the concept of infinitude, the traditional arguments for God's existence and Tillich's responses thereto and, above all the irrelevance of both atheism theism. Secondly, the philosophical foundational of Tillich's assertion 'God is Being-itself' has been closely scrutinized in the general background of the concept of an ultimate concern, which is the presupposition of all discussion on God, of approximation to ultimacy and of Tillich's agreement and disagreement with the Scholastic understanding of God's existence.

2. God's Infinitude

In Western thought the term God is usually associated with the Judaic-Christian concept of God. A basic characteristic attributed here to God is infinitude or 'illimitability'. The concept as such is negative and existence is the positive side of the same concept. The problem of God's existence, then, lies with the nature of his infinitude. The division in this matter is between those philosophers who interpret God pantheistically and those who interpret God theistically, especially of the Judeo-Christian persuasion to whom God wholly transcends the world. According to the pantheistic group of thinkers, the world, being divine, is also infinite (even if particular things and persons reflect its 'infinity' in a limited degree). Spinoza is one of the protagonists of this view, as elaborated in his work Ethics. (1985) Having posited a single substance, he affirmed that it must be infinite both in its essence and in its attributes. God must be infinite in his essence because if he were finite we could suppose the existence of something else by which he is, so that he could not now be the sole reality. His attributes must also be infinite, because if his essence is infinite, there must be an infinite number of ways in which it can be conceived. This view is in opposition to the theistic understanding which holds that the world is finite as created, and only God, as the creator, is infinite. It asserts that all perfections pre-exist in God eminently. But the mode of their existence in God is determined by the infinity, which God does not share with any creature. God's infinity, speaking negatively means 'notfinite'. In other words, God is free from the limitations which affect every other being. There are two fundamental limitations affecting the finite being in contrast to the infinity of God. First, every finite being is a mode of existence, for instance a man exists in one way and a dog in another. But, in contrast to this, God is existence per se. Second, if God is existence 'in-itself' then he must be self-existent and that he does not derive his being from any other source. Again, in contrast to this, all beings depend continuously on the creative act of God who alone is said to be. Both these aspects of the finitude of the created finite being are affirmed

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

by the Scholastics in the dictum that the existence of the finite being is limited by (or proportionate to) its finite essence. Likewise the two aspects of God's infinity are affirmed by the Scholastic dictum that in God essence and existence are identical. (Aquinas, 1952) The finitude of any being other than God consists in the lack of this identity at both points mentioned above. Its essence limits its existential act, and this limitation follows from its dependent character. It exists as 'this' or 'that' by its derivation from Being who is the necessary existence.

#### 3. Arguments for God's Existence

The demonstration of the existence of the theistic God is the concern of the many arguments for the existence of God. The prominent ones in this regard are the ontological and cosmological arguments. The former argument proceeds from the 'idea of God' to its necessary existence. St. Anselm spoke of God as a being greater than which nothing else can be conceived. (1965) In other words, God is so perfect that nothing more perfect can ever be conceived. This God exists in reality because if this most perfect conceivable being existed only in the mind, we should then have the contradiction that it is possible to conceive of a yet more perfect being, namely, the same being existing in reality as well as in the mind. Anselm further goes on to argue out not merely the existence but the necessary existence of God. Since God as infinitely perfect being is not limited in or by time, the possibilities of God's having ever come to exist or ever ceasing to exist are alike excluded, and thereby God's non-existence is rendered impossible. We may note, here, that existence in this argument is taken to be a necessary quality of God and it is predicated of God. This was clearly stated by Descartes, who claimed that existence must be among the defining predicates of God as argued in Fifth Meditations (1901) and Principles of Philosophy (1984). Just as the fact, that the sum total of the internal angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, is a necessary characteristic of a triangle, so is existence a necessary characteristic of a supremely perfect being. A triangle without its defining properties would not be a triangle, even so God without existence would not be God. But the ontological argument of Anselm was not philosophically invincible. For such a proof for the existence of God, on the basis of existence as a necessary attribute or predicate, was challenged and severely exposed by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason (1990) and later by Bertrand Russell in his theory of description (1946).

The cosmological argument, on the other hand, starts from some general features of the world around us. It argues that there could not be a world with the particular characteristics that, as a matter of fact, it has, unless there was also the ultimate reality which we call God. Thomas Aquinas is the best representative of this view. He outlined three main arguments for God's existence in *De Potentia Dei* (1952). The first statement of the argument shows that, since the act of being is central to all existents, there must be one universal cause of all and this cause is God. The second argument starts from the fact that all beings in our experience are imperfect and are not the source of their

actual being. The reasoning concludes from these contingent features of the world to the existence of the most perfect, the original source, a prime-mover that moves everything but itself remaining unmoved. The third argument implies reasoning from the composite nature of finite beings to the necessary, simple or pure existence of a primary being in which essence and the act of existing are identical. In this way Aquinas thought he had successfully argued for the existence of the reality of God as the universal cause, by which all other beings are brought forth into actual being. But the problem with such a method of arguing through a conclusion is that it restricts God to the finite realm. (Tillich, 1968) It contradicts the idea of the infinite God. Every argument derives its conclusion from something that is given to something that is only sought to be proved. In the arguments for the existence of God, the world is given and God is sought. Some characteristics of the given world make the conclusion of 'God's existence' necessary. Thus, God is derived from the world. This of course does not mean is dependent on the world. However, it means that, if we derive God from the world, he cannot be that which transcends the world infinitely. It does violence to the nature of God as infinite. God is the 'world', a missing part of that, from which he is derived as a conclusion. This contradicts the idea of God, his infinitude, in particular.

#### 4. Tillich's Position

When we speak of God's being Tillich observes that we have to focus on the ultimacy implicit in the concept. For Tillich, God is the ultimate concern. Ultimacy refers here to God's infinitude. The theistic philosophers thought it necessary to associate God's infinitude with God's existence. In other words, since God is infinite, since God is perfect, he must exist. This is the point of disagreement between Tillich and theistic philosophers. Tillich too holds that God is infinite, conditional and limitless. But unlike the others, it is this insistence that 'God is infinite, or unlimited', which led Tillich to assert that we should not even say that 'God exists', since this would be a limiting statement. He writes, "The 'existence of God' contradicts the idea of a creative ground of essence and existence. The ground of being cannot be found within the totality of beings, nor can the ground of essence and existence participate in the tension and disruption characteristic of the transition from essence to existence. The Scholastics were right when they asserted that in God there is no difference between essence and existence. But they perverted their insight when in spite of this assertion they spoke of the existence of God and tried to argue in favour of it. He is being-itself, beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exist is to deny him." (1968, P. 127) The phrase 'beyond essence and existence' in this context does not mean without it. God, as the ground, rather embraces both, though in an infinite way. It does however mean not being determined by it in the way in which the finite beings are determined. (Kegley and Bretall, 1952) Tillich's definition of God as 'Being-itself' means that God is not a being. Therefore, to say that 'God exists' is wrong, because only a being exists; only finite beings exists. In other words, existence is a characteristic of specific entities that can be isolated either by observation or by

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

<u>Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY</u>

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

thought. Existence is properly attributed to individual entities that are necessarily limited by others. God, who is beingitself, and not a being alongside other beings, cannot therefore be said to exist. This is precisely the reason why Tillich believes that the concept of existence is incompatible with the concept of God. The difficulty lies in that, when one uses existence with regard to God, God is being qualified in the way finite beings are. (1968, P. 127) Such a God is a being besides others, and as such becomes a part of the whole finite reality. He is of course considered as its most important part, nevertheless, a part of the created totality. He ceases to be the ground of all beings. Yet, he is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories, which constitute reality. But, then, every statement about him subjects him to them. He is seen as the 'self', who has a world, an 'environment' pitted against him, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and time distinct from eternality. Tillich's non-acceptance of God's existence is rooted in the rejection of such demeaning presupposition. (1968, P. 261)

Tillich believes that the being of God cannot be understood in terms of existence, because it would then imply a contradiction in the nature of God, namely, the distinction between God's essential and existential being. In other words, the statement, 'God exists', entails that God has an essence distinct from its act of existence. If he is existence he cannot be essence. Thus, the quality of existence, when used in reference to God, becomes a limiting concept. Essence, as used in the finite reality, denotes the potentialities of existence, and this essence also has being. This split is seen in the conflict between potentiality and actuality. Within reality there are structures, which have no existence and likewise, within reality there are things which have existence on the basis of those structures. 'Treehood', for instance, does not exist, although it has being, namely potential being. But the tree in the physical world exists. It stands out of the mere potentiality of treehood. But it stands out and exists, only because it participates in that power of being which is treehood, that power which makes every tree a tree and nothing else. Thus there is a clear differentiation between essence and existence, which are two types of being, and this structural truth characterizes everything in the finite realm. Therefore, if we say that 'God exists', we make God a being, whose existence does not fulfill his essential potentialities, being and not-yet-being are mixed in him, as they are in everything finite. God ceases to be God, as the ground of being and meaning. It was this logical fallacy in the idea of God's existence that Tillich was pointing to.

#### 5. The Problem of Theism and Atheism

It can be said that, in religious terms, Tillich rejected the existence of the theistic God because it makes God a supranatural deity. Supranaturalism is something that Tillich opposed no less than naturalism. His rejection is loud and unconditional. In describing his own intellectual orientation, Tillich refers to his rejection of supranaturalism and names this attitude elsewhere as the 'self-transcending realism'. Theism makes God a transcendent object, the creation an act

at the beginning of time, the consummation a future state of things. To criticize such a conditioning of the unconditioned, even if it leads to atheistic consequences is more religious because it is more aware of the unconditional character of the divine than a theism that bans God into the supranatural realm. (1948, P. 82) Against the supranaturalism of theism which, Tillich believes, obviously conditions being-itself, he justifies atheism as the right response. When the traditional atheist says, "God does not exist", it can be a reaction against theism, against the belief in a divine being besides the other beings. In making God an object besides other objects, the existence and nature of which are matters of argument, Tillich argues that theology supports the escape to atheism. (1968, P.245) In many of his statements, Tillich seems to be suggesting that 'God does not exist' is the right answer to the question of the arguments for the existence of God. And, this is the reason why many critics have labeled him as an atheist. For anyone who closely follows the thought of Tillich, however, this accusation stands on unfounded ground. Firstly, because Tillich by taking his stand against theism does not in any way reject God. Secondly, because it is his own special way of preserving God's unique nature. When Tillich defends atheism, he is defending it against theism. It is right only in the context of the literalism of theism and its validity goes only as far as it is a refutation of unguarded theism. Tillich sides with atheism because, in comparison with theism that transforms the ultimacy of the ultimate concern to the contingency of finite being, atheism is more aware of the unconditional character of the divine. But for this, the questions of atheism are as irrelevant as those of theism.

In the context of his doctrine of God as being-itself, Tillich rejects not only theism but also atheism. The question of the existence, as well as non-existence, of God for him can neither be asked nor answered. (Tillich, 1968, P.217) If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence. Therefore the answer, whether negative or positive, implicitly denies the nature of God. It is therefore as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, and this God, for Tillich, is above existence. So both the answers, 'God exists' and 'God does not exist', deny God by denying the nature of God. The unwanted consequences of the theistic assertion are already indicated. Theism, by attributing existence to God, brings him down to the level of a being: John exists, the Himalaya exists, the Outab Minar exists, so too, God exists. This is because only a finite being can exist. In this way theism, in affirming God, denies the nature of God as being-itself. This denial is clear and straightforward. But how do we understand the atheistic denial, 'God does not exist'? The atheistic denial is straightforwardly absurd. Let us replace the word 'God' in the statement, 'God does not exist', with 'being-itself'. The resultant statement would read now as, 'being-itself does not exist'. The God, of whom the predicate, 'does not exist', is stated, is being-itself, the God who is said to be beyond existence. Atheism, it may be pointed out, talks of God in terms of negation of something, a something which is not God's nature. To put it differently, atheism denies the existence about God, which is, in the first place, not a quality of (or attribute or related to) God at all, as of things in the finite realm. That is, existence is denied of

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

God, when it does not concern God at all. To understand the manifest absurdity of the position of atheistic denial, let us consider the statement, 'Man does not have wings'. In the statement 'wings' are denied of man, but, then, wings are not ever a part of man's nature, his physical make-up. So, this statement denies the nature of man, because it presupposes (or rather is based on the ground) that 'Man has wings'. In much the same way, the atheistic denial talks of God in terms of his existence, (though the negation of it), thus denying the nature of God.

# 6. God's Being: The Presupposition of Existence

After removing the tag of existence from God, Tillich thinks it is possible to properly understand the meaning and the nature of God – God is the answer to the question implied in man's infinitude. God is the answer to the question about the being and meaning of human life. The metaphysical question has now descended to human ontology, therefore to religion. Correspondingly, the debates of the classical philosophers will have to be revisited with a new perspective. Tillich opines that the so-called arguments for the existence of God should be looked at from an altogether different perspective. Even though he denies their validity as arguments, he accepts them as expressions of the human situation, or predicament, from which the question of God arises. They are valid in so far as they present an analysis of reality, which indicates that the question of God is unavoidable. They are however, wrong, in so far as they claim that the existence of a high being is the logical conclusion of their analysis. He states, "The arguments for the existence of God are neither the arguments nor the proofs of the existence of God. They are expressions of the 'question' of God which is implied in human finitude. The question is their truth; every answer they give is untrue...It must deprive them of their argumentative character, and it must eliminate the combination of the words 'existence' and 'God'. If this is accomplished, natural theology becomes the elaboration of the question of God, it ceases to be the answer to this question...the arguments for the existence of God analysis of the human situation in such a way that the question of God appears possible and necessary." (Tillich, 1968, P.228)

From the above statements we can note two points. Firstly, the question of God is a necessary and legitimate question. Secondly, this question is not, and should not be taken as the question about the existence of God. The reason why Tillich considers this question as necessary is clearly on account of the ontology he elaborates. The question is the result of the way man is, and he cannot be otherwise. We must not miss here the features of human ontology subscribed to by Tillich. The distinctive way that man is includes an immediate awareness of God. Tillich writes, "The question of God is possible because an awareness of God is present in the question of God. This awareness precedes the question. It is not the result of the argument but its presupposition. This certainly means that the 'argument' is not argument at all. It shows that an awareness of the infinite is included in man's awareness of finitude. Man knows that he is finite, that he is excluded from an infinity which nevertheless belongs to him.

He is aware of his potential infinity while being aware of his actual finitude." (Tillich, 1968, P.228) An immediate awareness of God, however faint, is part of the structure of human nature. Man may even be 'unconscious' of it, but the unarticulated awareness cannot be denied. Man knows that he is conditioned, and this points to his awareness of the unconditional element in reality. The unconditional is Beingitself, the true God. Being-itself is that which is not a special being or a group of beings, not something concrete or something abstract, but something which is always thought implicitly or sometimes explicitly is something is said to be. (Tillich, 1968, P.163)

Therefore, God as the Being-itself is the presupposition of any claim that something exists, but it does not mean that Being-itself exists. Its self-validation, to Tillich, is logically irrefutable. He writes, "You can deny any statement, but you cannot deny that being 'is'. You can deny anything particular whatsoever, but not being, because even your negative judgments themselves are acts of being and are only possible through being." (1967, P.80) When we consider a specific being such as a mountain or a fountain, we may affirm its existence or deny it. Tillich holds that it is in the possibility of such determination of beings that we affirm the reality of Being-itself. For being is the presupposition of ever affirmation and negation. We do not affirm it by consciously thinking about it; rather, in the very act of dealing with the question of the existence or non-existence of particular beings, we presuppose its reality. We presuppose the reality of that which is not a particular being, but that which accounts for there being something rather than nothing. Being-itself accounts for the fact that human beings exist, for their ability to raise question of finitude. Being-itself is not a specific entity. It is not a being, not even the highest being, necessary or perfect being. It is not a limited or contingent being that exists alongside others. It is the ground of there being anything at all. It is not the sort of entity that could conceivably exist. The Scholastics reasoning tends to limit God, by applying the word 'exist' to him. Any specific being is limited by the mere existence of other beings. Other beings are what it is not.

About the Being-itself that is God, the unconditioned, which is the presupposition of everything that is, Tillich writes in his Systematic Theology, "The unconditional element appears in the theoretical (receiving) function of reason as 'verum ipsum', the true-itself as the norm of all approximations of truth. The unconditional element appears in the practical (shaping) function of reason as 'bonum ipsum', the good-itself as the norm of all approximations to goodness. Both are manifestations of 'esse-ipsum', beingitself as the ground and abyss of everything that is." (P.229) The above statement is suggestive of Tillich's remarkable sensitivity to the philosophy of Scholasticism, despite his differences elsewhere. For, here, Tillich talks of being-itself as it is manifested in the realm of knowledge and morality. He is in agreement with the Scholastics here. In another passage he talks of being-itself in terms of transcendence and immanence, "As the power of God transcends every being and also the totality of being - the world, Being-itself is beyond finitude and infinity, otherwise it would be conditioned by something other than itself, and the real

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

ResearchGate Impact Factor (2018): 0.28 | SJIF (2018): 7.426

power of being would lie beyond both it and that which conditions it. Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite 'jump'. On the other hand everything finite participates in being-itself and its infinity. Otherwise it would not have the power of being." (Tillich, 1968, P.263) Thus, we see that, for Tillich, like the Scholastics, both transcendence and immanence are reconciled in the concept of participation. The finite beings participate and have their being in beingitself, but they do so in a limited way, hence, being-itself transcends them infinitely. The above analysis of God's being is consistent, because Tillich spoke of God existentially as the transcendent object of man's ultimate concern. He maintained that we would not know of our ultimate concern without participation in being itself.

#### 7. Conclusion

To conclude, one may have noticed by now that there is a certain presupposition, which is implicit in Tillich's vigorous argument that 'God does not exist'. He presupposes the meaning of 'existence' to be 'as we exist'. To exist 'as we exist', of course means to owe our whole reality to accidents and our continuance in existence to the favorable conditions of our environment. So, if to exist means 'as we exist', then, God does not exist. If 'existence' refers to something which can be found within the whole of reality, then, no divine being may be said to exist. But, then, we can surely raise the question as to why 'to exist' must mean 'as we do'? Tillich does not clarify this. This indeed is the objection against him, as adduced by William L. Rowe, "The paradox in Tillich is that in spite of his claim that existence is incompatible with the nature of God he nevertheless talks of God in such a way (as) to imply or presuppose that God exists. It is obvious that he cannot have it both ways." (1968, P.83) What Rowe is suggesting here is that Tillich wants to talk of God in such a way as to suggest that he exists, but, at the same time, to preclude the semantic possibility of raising the question of the existence of God. The question is how statements about God, which Tillich takes for granted, can be considered as true, if the statement, 'God exists', is false. To this criticism we can only reply that, firstly, Rowe is mistaken, if he believes that Tillich somehow implicitly suggest that God exists. 'God does not exist' is a statement most emphatic in Tillich's works. There is no ambiguity on this issue. However, the statement, 'God does not exist', does not mean that Tillich denies the reality of God. He does affirm that 'God is', although he denies that 'God exists'. Secondly, Rowe is mistaken, because Rowe takes such of those statements of Tillich as are made by him about God in the literal sense. Tillich never meant them to be literal statements about God. Rather they are symbolic expressions of being-itself.

#### References

- [1] Anselm, St. *St. Anselm's Prosologion*, trans. by M. J. Charlesworth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- [2] Aquinas, St. Thomas. *De Potentia Dei*, trans. by Lawrence Shapcote, Westminster, Md., 1952.

- [3] Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and (for vol. 3) Anthony Kenny. Eds. and Trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1-3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- [4] Descartes, Rene. *Descartes' Meditations*, as translated by John Veitch 1901.
- [5] Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason, trans. by Norman Kempt Smith, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990.
- [6] Kegley, Charles W. and Bretall, Robert W. (eds.). The Theology of Paul Tillich, New York and London: The Macmillan, 1952.
- [7] Rowe, William L. Religious Symbol and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- [8] Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1946.
- [9] Spinoza, Benedictus de. Edited and Translated by Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- [10] Tillich, Paul. *The Protestant Era*, Trans. and with a Concluding Essay by James Luther Adams, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.
- [11] Tillich, Paul. *My Search for Absolutes*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.
- [12] Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols., Digswell: James Nisbett & Co., London: 1968.

#### **Author Profile**

**T. Jamedi Longkumer** received the M.A and Ph.D degrees in Philosophy from North Eastern Hill University in 1998 and 2003, respectively. He is currently serving as Assistant Professor in Dimapur Government College under the Higher Education Department of Government of Nagaland, India.

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijsr.net

<u>Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY</u>



MDPI

Editorial

## Introduction: A Brief History of Theism and Its Alternatives

Roy C. Amore

Department of Political Science, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON N9B 3P4, Canada; amore@uwindsor.ca

This Special Edition includes articles discussing the many alternatives to the various forms of theism found among the majority of religious and some philosophical traditions.

#### 1. A Brief History of Theism

The term theism derives from the Greek word for God, theos. Ralph Cudworth is credited with coining the term in the 17th century to refer to a belief in God as a conscious mind who was the creator of the universe and is eternal. My usage differs from Cudworth's in that I do not limit 'theism' to monotheistic religions or gods who create or are eternal. I use the term for any attribution of some human-like agency to a deity, whether a god, a goddess or a male or female spirit. That is, to describe belief in any divine entity that is imaged to be somehow analogous to a human: to have thoughts akin to a human's, to have the power of motion or to have human-like emotions such as anger, love or jealousy. And in some mythologies, even to have sexual longings, affairs and children.

There are many instances of human-like behavior being attributed to animal spirits and forces of nature. Diseases such as toothache, fever and so on were once thought to be the work of evil spirits, while good spirits may help humans by countering evil spirits. Many cultures associate spirits with animals, especially ferocious animals such as bears, eagles or large felines. Clever animals, such as a raven or a fox, have also inspired a spirit's status. In one of the many ancient stories explaining how dry land emerged from a primordial ocean, some animal capable of diving is thought to have played a key role in creation. The 'earth-diving' turtle found in Asian and North American indigenous stories is an example.

Animal spirits are often associated with a god or goddess. Some well-known examples are Athena's owl, Shiva's bull Nandi or Lakshmi's elephant and owl. Each of Hinduism's major gods and goddesses has an associated animal understood as their means of movement, their vehicle (*vahana*). Strangely, a mouse is the vehicle of the large, elephant-headed god Ganesh.

The high god was associated with a bull in the ancient Near East and many other regions. In ancient Crete, worshippers passed between two huge bull horns. At Cathalhoyuk in ancient Anatolia, the rooms that appear to have served as temples display bucrania, the skull and horns of a bull. Associating god and a bull is found even among ancient Hebrews, who normally disdained images of God. During the Exodus, Aaron and the other Hebrews thought it appropriate to make an image of a golden calf to represent their god—only to be severely rejected by Moses. Later, when the northern kingdom (Israel) rebelled against the southern kingdom (Judah), King Jeroboam of Israel did not want his people to go to the temple in Jerusalem, so he built new temples at Dan and Bethel. He placed a golden bull calf in each of those temples, which he associated with Yahweh.

In the ancient Near East and beyond, some variety of feline was typically the animal associated with an important goddess. Baset in Egypt is an example. At Cathalhoyuk, James Mallaart unearthed several examples depicting the close association between a goddess and a large feline. In one small statue, the goddess is seated on a throne with a large feline on either side. Mallaart found a relief carving of a goddess figure giving



Citation: Amore, Roy C. 2023. Introduction: A Brief History of Theism and Its Alternatives. *Religions* 14: 1031. https://doi.org/10.3390/ rel14081031

Received: 1 August 2023 Accepted: 8 August 2023 Published: 11 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Religions **2023**, 14, 1031 2 of 6

birth to a cat on one wall. There are many examples in ancient Egypt of the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet. In Hinduism, the goddess Parvati is often depicted as sitting on a lion, as is Durga.

Snakes are sometimes thought to have divine powers as well. Due to snakes' ability to shed and renew their skin, some ancients believed snakes to be immortal—unless killed. In Hinduism and Buddhism, there is a belief in supernatural cobras (nagas) that live under the earth. They are thought to have special wisdom and are associated with jewels and pools of water.

Because gods and goddesses were not visible, ancient people imagined that they lived somewhere up high, either above the clouds or on a mountain. In Greek thought, the deities were said to dwell on Mount Olympus. In Hinduism, the god Shiva dwells on Mount Kailash. One of the early names of God in the Hebrew Bible is El Shaddai, likely meaning God of the Mountain(s), but that meaning is contested. In any case, the association of mountains and deities or spirits is widespread. Moses encounters God via a burning bush on a mountain. Later, while wandering in the wilderness, he withdraws to a high place to pitch his tent to get revelation from God.

The highest-ranking god is often seen as the creator, like an earthly king who makes and enforces laws. Like a king, God was to be feared as well as respected.

#### 2. God of the Gaps

The way that humans understand God has evolved through time. Whenever humans could not understand something in nature, they typically attributed it to a god or evil spirits if it was bad. For example, when humans did not understand the cause of volcanoes, many believed in a volcano god who got very angry occasionally. Just as angry humans can be appeased by gifts or special attention, a great sacrifice was needed to appease the volcano god. When humans could not understand how the sun and moon moved across the sky, they imagined them as gods or objects carried by chariots of the gods. When people marveled at the order in the world, they came to believe in a mastermind. When they did not understand how birds could fly, they believed that God, or angels, held them up. When lightning storms struck, humans explained it by believing in a storm god. When wise observers tracked the strange movements of the planets, the 'travelers', across the night sky, they believed the planets were gods, such as Venus and Mars, or Hindu planetary gods, such as Brihaspati (Jupiter) or Shani (Saturn).

This longstanding tendency to credit gods as the explanation for the gaps in human knowledge evolved as human understanding improved. When there no longer was a gap in the human understanding of volcanoes or storms, the belief in the volcano or storm god faded away, only to be replaced by the god of another gap in human knowledge.

Has human knowledge, based in modern science, developed to the point that there are no longer gaps for a god to fill? Science now has ready explanations for volcanos, storms, diseases, birds' flight, the sun's movement, the moon, planets, stars and even the universe's evolution. At least, many think so. This is partly why many now turn to various approaches to cultivating a 'spiritual' dimension, such as yoga, Buddhist or Hindu style meditation, Wicca or drugs. They may have some identification with a church, synagogue, mosque or temple. Still, they may only go there for major holidays or ritual occasions such as weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies or funerals. This is why there has been a dramatic rise in 'Nones' -- those whose religious self-identity is 'agnostic,' 'atheist' or 'nothing in particular'. A Pew Research Center survey found that almost one-third of Americans fall into the religious 'none' profile. ("About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated" https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-us-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated, accessed on 13 July 2023).

#### 3. A Brief History of Alternatives to Theism

Other views of God have been largely overlooked. These views are also very ancient and appear as minority views among most of the world's religions or spiritualities. This

Religions **2023**, 14, 1031 3 of 6

Special Edition is about some of those other views of god, such as where god is understood as the deep energy of the universe, or a cosmic spirit in all things, or in some other way. One of these alternate views might be a spiritual understanding that some moderns can embrace despite what we now know about volcanos, the age of the earth and the absence of a Zeus figure 'up there' somewhere on a mountain or in space.

#### 4. A God Who Is beyond Attributes or "Names"

In our modern, more secular culture, there is a disconnect between one's name and one's essence. Parents choose a name that has little or no connection to the essence or characteristics of the child. Traditionally, especially in religious usage, the concept name takes on some critical roles. In the traditional view, many attributes are ascribed to God, such as Creator, Judge, Ruler, Lawgiver, Truth, Great Being, Father or King. God may be described as wrathful or loving, wise, full of light, magnificent, all-powerful, all-knowing or great. These are just a few of the more than one hundred attributes or characteristics humans ascribe to God. Many religious traditions refer to such diving attributes as the "names" of God. For example, Islam has a list of 99 such names of God. This reflects an older use of the term in which a name refers to the essence of something. So, for instance, when a Christian prays 'In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', it refers to the essence of the divine rather than a mere name. When Japanese Pure Land Buddhists chant Namu Amida Butsu, "in the name (namu) of Amida Buddha," they mean to be putting their trust in the powerful 'essence' of Amida Buddha. All but one of the chapters (surahs) of the Quran begin with the invocation: "In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate". This Quranic invocation is called by its first word, Bismillah, which means 'in the name of Allah'.

Several religious traditions have mantras—sacred words to be chanted—composed of only the various names of their god. For example, the chant made famous in the West by the International Society of Krishna Consciousness has these four stanzas:

- 1. Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna
- 2. Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
- 3. Hare Rama, Hare Rama
- 4. Rama Rama, Hare Hare

The words in this sixteen-word chant comprise just three names, each a variant name of the same god. *Hare* is a vocative form of Hari, one of the names of the god Vishnu. *Rama* is the name of the prince, the central figure of the epic known as Ramayana (Rama-story). Rama is considered one of the incarnations of Vishnu and, therefore, is another name for Vishnu. *Krishna* is considered one of the incarnations of Vishnu by most Hindus, but the Hindus who chant this mantra understand Krishna as the name of the supreme godhead.

#### 5. The Nirguna God of the Hindu Philosopher Shankara

The famous Hindu philosopher Shankara taught and wrote, most likely in the 8th century. Shankara distinguished a god with attributes and one without attributes. In this context, the Sanskrit word for attributes is *guna*, which is similar to the names or 'qualities' of the divine.

Shankara called the god with attributes *saguna brahman*, meaning 'Brahman with guna'. Most Hindus then and now believe in this kind of god. Most Hindus still think of their gods and goddesses as having somewhat human-like characteristics. In contrast to these *saguna* concepts, Shankara wrote about a higher concept of a god beyond attributes (*nirgunas*). This *Nirguna* Brahman is not confined to our human concepts such as Father, Creator, Lord, Almighty, Truth, Goodness or even Eternal. The Nirguna Brahman is the ultimate god, beyond direct knowledge. The spiritual goal is to unite the soul, *atman*, with the Nirguna Brahman. Shankara's Nirguna Brahman is the essence, or energy, of the universe. It is what I call the Energy God.

Religions **2023**, 14, 1031 4 of 6

#### 6. The Energy God Is beyond Human Understanding

Shankara's claim that the ultimate god is without characteristics or names is his way of saying that the ultimate god is beyond human understanding. He is not alone in taking that seemingly extreme position. Many mystics from various religious traditions and centuries have made the same point in their way. In fact, it has become a running joke among scholars of mysticism to note that most mystics begin their book or treatise with the disclaimer that words can never express their experience of god. Then, they go on to write pages and pages of words about their experience of god! We understand, however. It is like when our little brother or sister asks what it is like to be in love. We start by saying that we cannot put it into words, but then we try to put it into words. The late poet Ogden Nash penned this limerick, "Whatever the mind comes at, God is not that".

#### 7. Laozi's Concept of Dao as the Mother of All Things

According to the legend, Laozi seems to have been rather grumpy about the state of public affairs in his day. He quit his archivist job and left China, riding west on his water buffalo. As luck would have it, the guard happened to be one of his student admirers as he came to the checkpoint at the border. That guard was distressed that their Old Master was leaving them. He pointed out to Laozi that he had often promised to put his teachings into writing someday. Trapped by his own promise, the Old Master agreed to put his thoughts in writing. He wrote down his teachings in the form of poetic and cryptic verses. The resulting book is known in the West as the Dao di Jing, or Tao De Ching in another way of transliterating Chinese.

One way to translate the opening lines of the Dao De Jing attributed to Laozi is "The Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name". (Jeff Pepper and Xiao Hui Wang, Dao De Jing in Clear English, Emagin8 Press, Verona, Pa, 2018, 14). The second line relates directly to the claim discussed by Shankara and others that God is beyond names. If we cannot conceptualize something, we cannot name it.

The Dao functions poetically, like a creator god. Yet this is nothing like the usual creator god. Dao does not use words or angels as the actors in creation. Dao does not create like a potter, watchmaker or architect. Dao does not need the help of earth-diving turtles or alien space creatures.

#### 8. The Pre-Socratics' Search for the First Principle (Arche)

The early Greek philosophers before Socrates thought deeply about the *arche* as a first cause or first principle, meaning that from which everything else derives. As philosophers rather than theologians, they used reason rather than stories about god. In the 5th century BCE, the standard view was that the world consisted of four basic elements: earth, air, fire and water. So, they tended to start with those four and then ask which of those was primary, the basic element.

Thales of Miletus sought a rational, rather than mythic, explanation for volcanos. The anger of a god did not cause them but was likely caused by the movement of the earth, which he thought floated on the water. In short, he came close to explaining what we now know as plate tectonics. When Thales turned his attention to the question of the first principle (*arche*), or original cause, he again reasoned that water was the first principle. His first cause might be understood as a fluid underlying all nature.

Anaximander talked about an undifferentiated, primal substance that underlies the four elements. This undifferentiated primal substance cannot be described. Like the Nirguna Brahman of Shankara, it is without qualities. Anaximander's idea was that a primal form of air is the first principle. This primal air then differentiates into the elements we perceive.

Heraclitus' first principle was fire, some primordial source of heat and energy. He also taught that all things come to pass from *logos*, 'word.' A similar view later shows up in

Religions **2023**, 14, 1031 5 of 6

the prologue to the Gospel of John in the New Testament. John equates logos, the means through which God creates, with Jesus.

Xenophanes severely attacked the traditional concept of gods with human-like characteristics. He suggested that if animals could speak and draw, they would describe and paint pictures of gods looking like those animals. He seems to have believed in a supreme god while stressing that the traditional views of a god were wrong.

#### 9. Guru Nanak's Concept of the Formless One

Having been born in the Punjab area in Northwest India in 1469, Nanak lived in a region with many Hindus as well as Muslims. The Muslims stressed the oneness of god and denounced the use of idols. Hindus, in sharp contrast, worshipped many gods and made great use of images of those gods in their temples and homes. Guru Nanak avoided using any of the Hindu god names or the Arabic term Allah. Instead, Nanak referred to god as Akal Purakh, the One Beyond Time. Or as Niranka, the Formless. Although Guru Nanak promoted a very personal relationship with Akal Purakh, he insisted that god is never incarnated and is self-existent.

#### 10. Christian Mystic Jakob Boehme's Concept of the Ungrounded

Jakob Boehme was a shoemaker and Lutheran Christian who lived in Germany. In 1600 Boehme had his life-changing mystical experience at the breakfast table as the early morning sun reflected off pewterware into his eyes. This burst of focused sunlight sparked a deep mystic experience. He felt like one with God and the universe. Later, other such visions led him to a theological view that is typical of mystics, whether Christian or other. God is infused in the universe.

One term that some German Christian mystics used for their understanding of God was *Urgrund*, the 'Original Ground.' The concept was that God is the underlying ground of being. Other German mystics used the term *Ungrund*, the 'Ungrounded.' Although 'Original Ground' and 'Ungrounded' may initially seem quite different—is God the ground or the ungrounded?—the two terms convey the same concept of God as the first cause. The energy basis underlies everything and everyone.

#### 11. Christian Theologian Paul Tillich on the Ground of Being

The 20th-century theologian Paul Tillich conceived of God in a way very similar to the Christian mystics. Tillich contrasts the traditional God with the Ground of Being:

The name of the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of our being is God. That depth is what the word God means. (Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of Foundations*, Crossreach Publications, chapter 7, kindle edition). Tillich took great steps in bringing the mystic view of God as *Urgrund* or *Ungrund* into mainstream Christian theology.

#### 12. Creating Versus Energizing

In contrast to theists, those who view God in a non-theistic way often understand creation as a flow of cosmic energy into a worldly form. The Tree of Life symbolizes this in Kabbalah and the alchemical worldview. As Boehme writes, "Now when God was to create the World, and all things therein, he had no other matter to make it of but his own Being, out of himself. But now, God is a Spirit that is incomprehensible, which has neither Beginning nor End, and his Greatness and Depth is all." (Jakob Boehme 2016. *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*. Kraus House, 1016. 1.)

The alternatives to theism do not form a unified spiritual worldview, but they call our attention to the long and diverse history of views that do not attribute human traits to views of the divine.

Religions **2023**, 14, 1031 6 of 6

#### **Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.

# God Beyond Theism? Bishop Spong, Paul Tillich and the Unicorn

Gregory W. Dawes

Prepublication version; final version published in *Pacifica* 15:1 (Feb. 2002): 65–71.



This draft paper is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License.

You are free to cite this material provided you attribute it to its author;
you may also make copies,
but you must include the author's name and a copy of this licence.

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/

#### Abstract

John Shelby Spong has recently advocated belief in a 'God beyond theism'. While rejecting traditional theism, he also distinguishes his position from atheism. He suggests that there is a divine reality, which may be described as 'being itself' and which reveals itself in our commitment to unconditional ideals. The paper argues that this notion of God is vacuous, the product of a confused belief that 'being' is a characteristic of individual beings which may be universalized. Belief in such a God is also unmotivated, since there exist naturalistic explanations of the phenomena to which the Bishop appeals.

John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, is a prolific writer. His seventeen books – ranging from *Honest Prayer* (1973) to his most recent *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality* (2001) – along with his numerous articles and public appearances have won him a wide following. Interestingly, that following extends well beyond the bounds of the established churches: it includes many whose affiliation with any form of traditional religion is minimal or non-existent. His recent visit to New Zealand attracted audiences far in excess of that which one would normally expect for a theological discussion, while he also received considerable attention in the electronic and print media.

Given the controversial and populist nature of Bishop Spong's work, it is easy for those engaged in the academic study of religion to hold it in some contempt. It is true that his books are not closely argued and his claims are not well documented. On occasions he is guilty of egregious errors, as when he attributes the abandonment of the 'God hypothesis' in modern science to the work of Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727).¹ (In fact, of course, Newton was not only a devout, if unorthodox, Christian, but his physics actually required occasional divine interventions to shore up the mechanism of the universe.²) But despite these signs of sloppy scholarship, many of the Bishop's central ideas have a respectable intellectual pedigree. Therefore what he is saying deserves closer scrutiny by students of religion. In what follows I want to illustrate this claim by reference to one of the Bishop's most recent themes: the idea that our understanding of God must progress beyond the 'theism' of Christian history.

In his espousal of belief in a 'God beyond theism', Bishop Spong is clearly dependent on the work of the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich.<sup>3</sup> It was Tillich who first spoke of the need for Christianity to transcend 'theism in all its forms', so as to begin speaking about 'the God above God', who is the ultimate source of our 'courage to be'.<sup>4</sup> So if we are looking for a developed form of the views held by Bishop Spong – one which is worthy of intellectual engagement – we may find this in the work of Paul Tillich. In what follows I will use Tillich's work to interpret the Bishop's views, before posing a few questions.

I will not spend much time on the critical side of the Bishop's work, with which (as it happens) I am fundamentally in agreement. I am sympathetic to the view that 'the gods' are nothing other than what Tillich calls 'images of human nature or subhuman powers raised to a superhuman realm' To this

<sup>1</sup> John Shelby Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), p.34; 'Is God [a] Miracle Worker?' The Voice (Diocese of Newark Newspaper)

http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox30999.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen F. Mason, *A History of the Sciences* Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan,1962), pp.205-6.

<sup>3</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.64-5.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1952), p.176.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Combined Volume* (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet & Co., 1968), vol. 1, p.235.

extent, I would accept the classic modern criticism of religion, dating from the time of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), which regards the gods as creations of human beings, projections of elements of human experience into an unseen world. I am happy to accept the 'postmodern' claim that many of the entities posited by the modern sciences must be seen in a similar light. These, too, draw upon analogies in everyday experience to create models which are used to explain the underlying reality of the world.<sup>6</sup> The difference – and it's a key one – is that the models created by the sciences are subject to a rigorous process of criticism. In other words, any such model will eventually be abandoned if it is not performing its explanatory role. I therefore regard the modern sciences as the most reliable means we have of arriving at a knowledge of reality, without (I think) falling into a kind of uncritical realism about their results. Religions, on the other hand, are notoriously resistant to criticism, being inclined to the view that their models are divinely revealed and therefore the subject of certain knowledge.

I am also inclined to agree with the Bishop that since the emergence of the modern sciences in the seventeenth century – with their impersonal models of explanation and their tradition of critical rationality – there is little point in trying to explain the way things are by reference to a divine being. Indeed insofar as religions employ personal rather than impersonal models to describe the underlying reality of the world, their claims simply fall outside what Michel Foucault would call the 'episteme' of modern knowledge. It is this realization that lies behind the Bishop's references – not entirely accurate, as we have seen – to Sir Isaac Newton, to suggest that the modern sciences have gradually made appeal to divine activity redundant. It lies behind the claim made by New Testament scholar turned atheist Michael Goulder and endorsed by the Bishop, that 'the God of the past "no longer [has] any real work to do". It also explains the Bishop's attitude to prayer, expressed in the

<sup>6</sup> Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on magic, religion and science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.321-27.

<sup>7</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'Can One Be a Christian Without Being a Theist?' *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox21096.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (1966; New York, NY: Random House, 1970), pp.xiv, xxii, et passim.

<sup>9</sup> Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*, pp.44, 54; The God Beyond Theism', *The Voice* (Diocese of Newark) http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox31099.html (19 June 2001).

tenth of his Twelve Theses (apparently modelled on Martin Luther's), where he writes that 'prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way'. For if one can no longer appeal to a divine being to explain the course of events, then any attempt to persuade that deity to alter the course of events is obviously doomed to failure. While others may wish to debate these views, their defence would be the work of another day. For the moment, I need only note that I have no serious disagreement with the Bishop's more substantive conclusions.

Where we differ is in the consequences we draw from these conclusions. If one accepts the critical arguments outlined above, the obvious consequence would seem to be atheism. One would not need to adopt a 'strong' atheism, which would deny the existence of God outright. But these arguments do seem to entail at the least a 'weak' atheism, or (if one prefers) a strong agnosticism, which denies that we have sufficient reason for affirming God's existence. For if belief in God can be accounted for in purely naturalistic terms and if appeals to the actions of God are no longer a plausible way of explaining the existence and shape of the world, it is hard to see what other grounds we could have for affirming his reality. Yet Bishop Spong claims not to be an atheist. He continues to use religious language and his words imply that this language has a distinctive referent, albeit one about which we can say very little. For instance, the Bishop speaks of 'experiencing God' in terms which suggests that this is an experience of something, or someone, who cannot be simply identified with the other objects of our experience. He says that this God is the 'ultimate reality' in his life, that he lives in 'a constant and almost mystical awareness of the divine presence'.11 He says that he is among those who 'cannot cease believing', since God is 'too real' to allow them to do so.<sup>12</sup> But what is this reality? Where is it to be found? How can we know about it?

It is at this point that the Bishop's language becomes both 'elusive and allusive'. Often his position looks like yet another retreat to religious experience, a tactic characteristic of liberal theology since the time of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). We can (it seems) no longer speak of

<sup>10</sup> John Shelby Spong, 'A Call for a New Reformation' http://www. dioceseofnewarkorg/jsspong/reform.html (19 June 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Fink, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p.275.

God, in any traditional sense, but we can continue to speak of our 'God-experiences'.Yet the Bishop's position is not identical with that of theological liberalism. He does speak of an experience of God, which is the basis of his faith, but it is a very particular kind of experience. God is the source of human love which (or whom) we know in the very act of loving wastefully; he is the Ground of Being which (or whom) we come to know when we ourselves have the courage to be.<sup>14</sup>

For the philosopher, of course, such expressions are infuriatingly vague. (Indeed one is tempted to say that their vagueness is their strength, since the Bishop's readers can find in them whatever meaning they want.) But they take on a more precise meaning in the work of Tillich. We may begin with Tillich's analysis of human rationality, which he understands in a very broad sense, as encompassing all of our cultural life. Tillich argues that there exists a depth dimension to human reason, which precedes the division into knowing subject and known object.15 This takes the form of a quest for an limitless and unconditioned reality, which is implicit in our all dealings with the limited and conditioned objects of experience.<sup>16</sup> In the field of cognition, this involves a striving for what Tillich calls 'truth itself', 17 a truth that is not relative and partial but absolute and complete. In the field of aesthetics, it takes the form of the striving for 'beauty itself',18 a striving which underlies every artistic work. In the field of law, this depth dimension has the form of a striving for 'justice itself', while and in the field of personal relations it takes the form of a striving for 'love itself'. 19 These are all examples of what Tillich famously calls our 'ultimate concern'.20

The existence of this ultimate concern raises the central question of religion. Is there a way in which the conflicts which arise in the exercise of reason – conflicts between the conditioned and the unconditioned – can be overcome<sup>21</sup>? Revelation answers this question in symbolic language. It does so

<sup>14</sup> Spong, 'The God Beyond Theism' and Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.68-70.

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, The Courage to Be, p.179.

<sup>17</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.104.

by way of insights received in what Tillich calls a state of 'ecstasy'. A state of ecstasy is a 'state of mind in which reason is beyond itself, that is, beyond its subject-object structure' and thus capable of grasping the reality for which it is striving. The reality it grasps is that of the ground or power of being, a which Tillich identifies with God. As the ground or power of being, God is 'being itself'. Incidentally, it is because God is 'being itself' that He cannot be thought of as a being among other beings, whose existence could be a matter of dispute. Even to talk about God as the 'highest being' is to reduce Him to the level of other beings and to deny His true nature. To speak of God as a 'person' without due qualifications is to fall into the same trap.

What can we make of these ideas? Let me begin with some positive comments. I believe that, at least in the first part of this argument, Tillich (and by association Bishop Spong) have identified something of philosophical interest. If we assume the most plausible view of human origins we have, namely the Darwinian one, there is something remarkable about our commitment to certain ideals – let's call them the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness – in a world in which they seem impossible of realization. At first sight this commitment is not readily explicable as the product of an evolutionary process which has no other 'purpose' (loosely speaking) than the successful propagation of organisms. Indeed at least two contemporary philosophers have suggested that it simply cannot be accounted for on evolutionary grounds at all.<sup>29</sup> This is not a question I wish to adjudicate. All I wish to note is that there is a question here worthy of investigation.

However, there is a theological tradition dating to the time of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) which goes further. It suggests that the existence of at least some of these ideals implies the existence of God. Loosely speaking, it is this

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.261-62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.264-65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.262.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.271.

<sup>29</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.216-37; Anthony O'Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

tradition to which Tillich and Bishop Spong seem to belong.<sup>30</sup> More precisely, for Tillich the experience of the finitude – the limited and conditioned character – of human existence raises the *question* to which the Christian revelation of God is the symbolic *answer*. As 'being itself', God is the implicit goal of our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness. He makes possible a life lived in hope in pursuit of these goals, a life which Tillich describes as the 'New Being' of faith-filled existence.<sup>31</sup>

Such claims seem to go far beyond what is warranted by the evidence. First of all, there are some philosophical objections to the way in which both Tillich and Bishop Spong describe the reality of God. As we've seen, Tillich's preferred designation of God is 'being itself', a phrase which the Bishop also uses.<sup>32</sup> This is, of course, a very traditional designation of God. No less a figure than Thomas Aquinas refers to God as ipsum esse subsistens: 'being itself existing'.33 But at least as used by Tillich, this expression seems to be the product of a twofold confusion. The first mistake is that of regarding the word 'being' as a descriptive word, capable of picking out some characteristic which all beings have in common.<sup>34</sup> The problem here, as Kant pointed out, is that 'being' is not a descriptive term.<sup>35</sup> I take nothing away from the idea of a unicorn - I deprive it of none of its characteristics - if I judge that no unicorns exist. A second error lies in imagining that 'being' can be meaningfully spoken of as a universal, as having some kind of quasiindependent existence, so that one can speak not just of the being of individual beings, but of 'being itself'.36 It is true that Bishop Spong seems to

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.91 n.1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>32</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.57.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae Ia qu.4 art.2 ad 2.

<sup>34</sup> Sidney Hook, 'The Quest for "Being" *The Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1953), p.718; A. M. Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in his Philosophical Theology* Contemporary Religious Thinkers (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp.88-99.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), A598-99; B626-27 (pp.504-5).

<sup>36</sup> H. A. Craighead, 'Paul Tillich's Arguments for God's Reality' *The Thomist* 39 (1975), pp.309–18; Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.718.

prefer what is for Tillich an equivalent term,<sup>37</sup> namely 'ground of being'.<sup>38</sup> At first sight, this suggests a very traditional conception of God: an infinite, necessary being who sustains the world of contingent, finite beings. Yet such a God is nothing less than the God of 'theism', which Spong and Tillich reject.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, on the very grounds that the Bishop has brought forward, it is not clear why we need to use this word 'God' at all. For the Bishop's mysterious 'ground of being' is apparently not responsible for the way the world is. As we have seen, the Bishop has already argued that the sciences have made such explanatory appeals to divine action redundant. If, with Tillich, the Bishop wishes to see mystical depths in our strivings for truth, beauty and goodness, then it is not at first sight clear why we need God in this context, either. We can regard such ideals as simply projections to an ideal limit of qualities which we happen to value for all sorts of ultimately practical reasons. In this case, they would be are no more pointers to a divine 'ground of being' than is the mathematician's parallel creation of the idea of infinity.<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, to recognise that all these ideals are our creations – that they are to a certain extent fictions, to which no reality completely corresponds – is not necessarily to undermine their force. A world without God, contrary to much theological (and even 'postmodern') polemics, is not necessarily a world without truth or value.41

In a word, what is most problematic about the Bishop's position is not his criticism of traditional religious language. It is the fact that he continues to use language about God, when that language seems to have been emptied of its content and stripped of its necessity. The Bishop will not only need to show his theological opponents that this 'God beyond God' has religious power. He will need to show his philosophical opponents that we *need* to continue to speak of God, in a world in which entirely naturalistic explanations are on offer for the phenomena to which he appeals. He will also need to show that the term 'God', which he continues to employ, is something more than an

<sup>37</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.261.

<sup>38</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, pp.215-19.

<sup>39</sup> Spong, Why Christianity Must Change Or Die, p.46; Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p.232.

<sup>40</sup> Hook, 'The Quest for "Being", p.719.

<sup>41</sup> For an assertion of the importance of ethical values in the context of a very strongly naturalistic explanation of their origins, see J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977; London: Penguin, 1990).

empty abstraction. For there are good reasons to believe that a God so stripped of all the characteristics of an individual being has, in fact, no reality at all.



# Chapman University Chapman University Digital Commons

Mathematics, Physics, and Computer Science Faculty Articles and Research Science and Technology Faculty Articles and Research

5-12-2016

# Fundamental Awareness: A Framework for Integrating Science, Philosophy and Metaphysics

Neil D. Theise Icahn School of Medicine

Menas Kafatos Chapman University, kafatos@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/scs\_articles

Part of the Metaphysics Commons, Philosophy of Science Commons, and the Quantum Physics
Commons

#### Recommended Citation

Theise, N. D., & Kafatos, M. C. (2016). Fundamental awareness: A framework for integrating science, philosophy and metaphysics. *Communicative & Integrative Biology*, 9(3), e1155010. http://doi.org/10.1080/19420889.2016.1155010

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Science and Technology Faculty Articles and Research at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mathematics, Physics, and Computer Science Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

## Fundamental Awareness: A Framework for Integrating Science, Philosophy and Metaphysics

#### Comments

This article was originally published in *Communicative & Integrative Biology*, volume 9, issue 3, in 2016. DOI: 10.1080/19420889.2016.1155010

#### **Creative Commons License**



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 License

#### Copyright

The authors



REVIEW 3 OPEN ACCESS

# Fundamental awareness: A framework for integrating science, philosophy and metaphysics

Neil D. Theise<sup>a,b</sup> and Menas C. Kafatos<sup>c,†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Pathology, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY, USA; <sup>b</sup>Department of Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY, USA; <sup>c</sup>Schmid College of Science & Technology, Chapman University, Orange, CA, USA

#### **ABSTRACT**

The ontologic framework of Fundamental Awareness proposed here assumes that non-dual Awareness is foundational to the universe, not arising from the interactions or structures of higher level phenomena. The framework allows comparison and integration of views from the three investigative domains concerned with understanding the nature of consciousness: science, philosophy, and metaphysics. In this framework, Awareness is the underlying reality, not reducible to anything else. Awareness and existence are the same. As such, the universe is non-material, self-organizing throughout, a holarchy of complementary, process driven, recursive interactions. The universe is both its own first observer and subject. Considering the world to be non-material and comprised, a priori, of Awareness is to privilege information over materiality, action over agency and to understand that qualia are not a "hard problem," but the foundational elements of all existence. These views fully reflect main stream Western philosophical traditions, insights from culturally diverse contemplative and mystical traditions, and are in keeping with current scientific thinking, expressible mathematically.

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 December 2015 Revised 9 February 2016 Accepted 10 February 2016

#### **KEYWORDS**

awareness; complementarity; consciousness; cosmology; emergence; idealism; monism; mysticism; philosophy; process; quantum physics

#### Introduction

Three primary domains of human investigation and experience offer insights into the nature and origin of what is generally termed as consciousness: philosophy, contemporary (hypothesis driven) science based on third person or objective perspective, and first person metaphysical experiences arising from contemplative and other (e.g. ecstatic, psychopharmacologic) spiritual practices. The most fundamental unanswered question is that of the "hard problem:"

Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue, the sensation of middle C? How can we explain why there is something it is like to entertain a mental image, or to experience an emotion? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does.<sup>1</sup>

Another way to ask this: how is it that conscious beings are aware of qualia, i.e. the experiences of consciousness? And how do we know that our experiences conform to others? As yet, none of these domains of human knowledge have resulted in a convincing, integrative solution to the hard problem of qualia, though extensive reporting of first person experiences points in a possible direction.

We feel that a generalized framework for considering the nature of consciousness can solve the hard problem if it considers inputs from all three investigational domains: scientific, philosophical, and metaphysical. We will also argue that reductionist, materialist science has hit a dead end and a radical approach departing from the practices of the last century needs to be adopted. A systemic failure to prioritize this kind of truly broad spectrum, cross-cultural engagement is identifiable among many, if not most practitioners in all three domains. However, not only should every possible resource be taken advantage of, but a theory that incorporates all three may best serve to create a language with which all participants working in the field of consciousness studies can engage each other in meaningful dialog despite the

CONTACT Neil D. Theise ntheise@chpnet.org Department of Pathology, Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center, First Avenue at 16th Street, New York, NY 10003, USA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup>Fletcher Jones Endowed Professor of Computational Physics

significantly different backgrounds, world views, and training. In fact, we argue here that what is needed is an integrated approach, a transdisciplinary framework allowing different perspectives and integration across widely different disciplines.

For such a synthesis we here specify a monistic form of idealism, that we call Fundamental Awareness. Monistic views posit that everything in existence, all "reality," is comprised of a single substance: material (the reigning paradigm in contemporary science, other than perhaps quantum physics), ideal (comprising of non-material "mind" or "spirit"), or neutral (neither material nor nonmaterial). In this paper, we present a synthesizing philosophical and scientific (e.g., physics, biology, neuroscience, etc.) statement that can be explanatory of the hard problem and lend insight to a diverse group of metaphysical traditions. We argue that even for the so-called physical world, any attempt of a Theory of Everything will fail outside the framework proposed here. We will first briefly describe concepts and practices from the scientific and metaphysical domains that we believe, at minimum, need to be incorporated into this philosophical tradition. We will then weave these into a statement of Fundamental Awareness beginning with a primary axiom and associated statements to define the "one substance" underlying existence as non-dual "pure awareness" or "awareness of awareness," a discussion of the initiating symmetry breaking (of non-duality into the initiating duality of self and other, subject and object), the three inherent, scale independent, universal organizing principles which act as natural laws for all levels of reality implied by this framework (i.e., complementarity, process, recursion), and will finish by returning to a brief summary of some close affinities of these concepts for the scientific, metaphysical and philosophical domains.

#### **Central themes of Fundamental Awareness**

The following bodies of knowledge and experience are the essential elements from which we build our framework. We believe that any framework to understand consciousness that does not incorporate these bodies of knowledge, at least, or attempts to link them in an integrated manner is, at best, incomplete and most likely circular and inconsistent with quantum mechanics and the nature of experience itself.

#### **Quantum mechanics**

Understandings of quantum mechanics (QM) from the Copenhagen Interpretation (CI) of Bohr and his early quantum physicist peers, through subsequent elaborations and extensions by Heisenberg, Born, Pauli and still later on von Neumann, Wigner, Stapp and Kafatos indicate the central and essential role of the conscious observer in the moment by moment evolution of the universe.<sup>2-8</sup> The essential core experiment demonstrating such intertwining of observer and observed is the famous "double slit experiment" in which a conscious observer makes a free choice regarding how to examine the system of a beam of quanta (e.g. electrons, photons) passing through two parallel slits to produce an impact pattern on the screen beyond the slits. If the experimenter makes an observation of the electrons passing through one of the slits, by knowing that indeed it passed through that slit using a probing interaction, then the observed pattern behaves like that produced by particles following a defined trajectory straight through the slit hitting the screen and assembling into two bands directly opposite the slits, as expected for particle behavior. On the other hand, in the absence of direct observation, as they pass through one slit or the other, the screen shows an interference pattern indicating the wave-like nature of the electrons.

In the orthodox CI and in subsequent enhancements by von Neumann, the wave function that describes possible outcomes of a quantum event is a complete description of all such possibilities and therefore, prior to observation, all these possibilities exist in superposition. The "collapse of the wave function" into a single "actual" event is triggered by a specific measurement which is set up by an observer, or a conscious observation of the system. The (in)famous example of Schrödinger's Cat being both "alive and dead" until the quantum event which would trigger the release (or non-release) of poison into the cat's box is directly observed in recent quantum experiments.<sup>9,10</sup> Whether we focus on the wave/particle duality of light or the alive/dead state of the cat, it is conscious measurement that creates the actual outcome of the system being observed. In this sense, quantum phenomena are contextual. One cannot speak of "independent" outcomes without the measurement context used to examine such phenomena.

The implications of these views were hotly debated with, most notably, Einstein. His most significant attempt to undermine the views of Bohr and CI in general, was the work with Podolsky and Rosen in the so-called "EPR paradox" which they made to provide arguments for the incompleteness of QM.<sup>10</sup> However, they assumed that the result, namely "entanglement," was impossible, thinking they had therefore found a way to undercut the orthodox interpretations of QM. As we know, the opposite has occurred, with entanglement repeatedly being demonstrated in many experiments spanning several decades in well controlled experiments, not only in the



quantum realm, but now in the macroscopic realm with entanglement within diamond crystals. 11-14 A possible way out remained if one could prove that there were "hidden variables" linking the two particles that would account for the correlations of seemingly entangled structures. 15,16 However, such hidden variable theories have proven untenable.

Specifically, in 1964 John Bell proposed a theorem and mathematical formalism to test for the existence of local realism that would require hidden variables implied by the EPR paradox. This achievement then pointed to methods for testing quantum mechanical predictions, developing what has now come to be known as "Bell's Inequalities:" the basis for determining whether there are hidden variables within a system. 15 A full description of the logic of derivation and logic of Bell's Inequalities is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the important point is that he showed that if the inequalities were ever not satisfied, then it would be impossible to have a local hidden variable theory that accounted for the QM findings and, therefore, the EPR critique of the Copenhagen Interpretation would also be wrong.

As pointed out in "The Consciousness Universe: parts and wholes in modern physical theory:" 8

- 1. In an attempt to preserve the classical view of oneto-one correspondence between every element of the physical theory and physical reality, some physicists have assumed that the wave aspect of a quantum system is real in the absence of observation or measurement. Based on this assumption, several well-known physicists have posited theories with large cosmological implications in an attempt to obviate or subvert wave-particle dualism and quantum indeterminacy. [...] however, Bell's theorem and the experiments testing that theorem have revealed that these attempts to preserve the classical view of correspondence are not in principle subject to experimental proof, and must, therefore, be viewed as little more than philosophical speculation.
- 2. When we properly evaluate the observational conditions and results of experiments testing Bell's theorem, it becomes clear that wave-particle dualism and quantum indeterminacy are facts of nature that must be factored into our understanding of the nature of scientific epistemology. In doing so, we are obliged to recognize that any phenomena alleged to exist in the absence of observation or measurement in quantum physics cannot be viewed as real.
- 3. In words often attributed to John Archibald Wheeler, "no phenomenon can be presumed to be a real phenomenon until it is an observed phenomenon."

There are now several experiments performed over the years by A. Aspect and collaborators in Paris, <sup>17</sup> by N. Gisin and collaborators in Geneva<sup>18</sup> as well as several other laboratories in the US and elsewhere, vindicating quantum predictions to a surprising degree of accuracy. Thus, while there are some alternate interpretations of QM that differ significantly from the line of thought that descends through Bohr, Heisenberg, Pauli, Born and von Neumann in particular, many of these do so only out of an urge to preserve a classical world view (see http://en. wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpretations\_of\_quantum\_mechanics# Summary\_of\_common\_interpretations\_of\_quantum\_ mechanics). This, we believe, in part represents the imperative of the dominant philosophy of science of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most robustly developed by the Vienna Circle: logical positivism. In this philosophical system, only statements verifiable either logically or empirically would be cognitively meaningful. Developed in the absence of a knowledge of or acceptance of the findings of QM already coming out of Copenhagen, these philosophers reified a materialist view of the world that closed the door on metaphysical speculations. 19,20

While logical positivism eventually declined in influence within the world of philosophy itself, its influence in the halls of academic and popular science remains supreme. It remains the dominant contemporary world view: the world is material and empirical science is the only appropriate method for understanding the world. Thus, we now find that, for the most part, there is a tacit belief in contemporary culture that only empirical science can explain consciousness itself. However, for the purposes of this Fundamental Awareness framework and remaining unhindered by the skeptical prejudices of this world view, we consider the Copenhagen Interpretation, particularly in the orthodox forms elaborated by von Neumann, to be the most relevant to understanding consciousness in the universe. As Henry Stapp has said (personal communication):

The radical innovation of standard quantum mechanics, relative to its classical forerunner, is that it is intrinsically a psychophysical theory in which our conscious mental intentions are not predetermined by the physically described aspects of the theory, yet play an essential causal dynamical role in the theory, which generates predictions about phenomena in physically described contexts, and hence effectively solves the "hard problem."

#### The universe is a self-organizing system

The universe is comprised of self-organizing systems, in which every part, at every level of scale, contributes to the emergent properties of the whole. 21-29 Thus, according to generally accepted, consensus opinions regarding the sciences, the physical universe arises and manifests from interactions between space and time, matter and energy at the smallest (Planck) scale. While there is as yet no confirmed and comprehensive view of the Planck scale of existence, we consider a generalized view that a quantum foam of entities arises within or from the vacuum. These entities, by interacting with each other, give rise to (at least) the wave/particle entities described by the Standard Model of particle physics. (Self-organizing entities which comprise dark matter and dark energy are implicitly included in all these discussions, though the absence of details concerning their nature precludes further inclusion in our framework; to be continued!)

As such, time and space emerge with the quantum foam and the universe begins its rapid, exponentially expanding evolution.<sup>30,31</sup> When in permissive physical conditions of this evolving inflationary universe, the resultant self-organizing wave/particles in turn self-organize into larger wave/particles and then into atoms and from this point on proceeds the evolution of the universe according to standard cosmology. This self-organization is of course mediated by the known forces: weak, strong, electromagnetic and gravitational which apply throughout, though their relative importance is scale dependent. Some of these self-organized (and self-organizing) entities, in permissive conditions such as the temperate, highly aqueous world of our own planet, also give rise to living systems which on Earth have taken the form of cells, multicellular organisms, and thence to local or planetary ecosystems ("Gaia").

Whether the self-organization arises from linear systems of interaction (e.g., in primarily quantum field and thermodynamic processes) or in non-linear systems (e.g. all known biological entities, multi-body gravitational systems), emergent phenomena develop at higher levels of scale that arise from the interactions at lower levels of scale. What these generalized forms of self -organizing complexity have in common are:

- 1. All systems at every level of scale, quantum and classical - are comprised of potentially interactive entities. (Given that "interactions" at this level of scale are based on the non-local nature of all phenomena, the construct intra-activity is probably more accurate; however, for the sake of simplicity here and later we will encompass non-local and local behaviors as interactions and interactivity.)
- 2. The nature of self-organization is dependent on the numbers of interacting entities and the richness of the modes of possible interaction.
- 3. There is a necessary role for limited randomness ("quenched disorder") at all levels of scale which allows for structural stability and/or adaptive self-organization in the face of changing

environmental conditions. Too much disorder and there can be no self-organization; too little and there is no ability for an adaptive change in the forms of self-organization in response to a changing environment.

In all of these systems, the properties of the whole are not predicted by the characteristics of the lower scale parts that comprise them, as long as there are sufficient numbers of these parts and the conditions of interaction and environment are appropriate to allow for self-organization, relatively stable higher scale, emergent structures will arise.8 The sum is not just the collection of all parts; it is much more than that. So at the quantum scale there are interactions between wave/particle entities to give rise to such emergent structures as plasmas, Bose-Einstein condensates, or larger wave/particle entities or atoms, etc. At higher scales, atomic and molecular self-organizations yield the emergent properties of the substances and materials of our own, usual level of scale: wetness of water, hardness of diamonds, softness of talc.

And then, in biological systems, we find the emergent properties of autopoietic, living beings which, according to Maturana and Varela<sup>33</sup> and their scientific/philosophical descendants, 33,34 includes cognitive capacities such as sentience and sense making (eventually inclusive of animal and human minds), possibilities for reproduction, and adaptive, evolutionary change in response to changing environments. Such autopoietic systems then further selforganize into communities (e.g., cities, cultures, ecosystems) with similar capacities for adaptive change (though, given the technically unbounded nature of such communities, it is difficult to class them as strictly autopoietic).

Conceptualizing the world, then, as a nested hierarchy undermines the idea of a materialist universe, a universe that in some sense is knowable from some initial conditions and through the application of dynamical equations of physics, made of "stuff" such as matter and energy, or even time and space through which matter and energy move and interact. However, it is in total resonance with the view of a quantum universe which eventually appears to conscious observers as the classical world. The appearance of material stuff is scale dependent. Two examples of appearances that are scale dependent (and which may be reified by an observer as having inherent existence):

- 1. A "bait ball" of fish appears from a distance as a single, unified, albeit moving globe-like entity, but on closer view resolves into, not a thing per se, but a phenomenon arising from smaller things, the fish themselves (Fig. 1A).
- 2. A murmuration of starlings appears like moving shapes in the sky, but these also, like the bait ball, resolve at

closer inspection into a phenomenon made up of smaller things (Fig. 1B).

In turn, the bodies of each fish or bird (or, for that matter, of you, our reader), in turn, are also not things at all: at the microscopic level each body resolves into a phenomenon arising from the interactions among the community of component cells comprising the organism. Thus "thingness," the appearance of materiality, even of living things, is dependent on the scale of observation. 26-28

(In all of these there is a role for randomness, not complete disorder, but quenched disorder. These are definitional in the behaviors of quantum systems: the wave functions which define possible behaviors are not purely random, but by definition are display a constrained stochasticity. Such limited randomness is then necessary in biological systems for what Stuart Kauffman has called the development of "adjacent possibles" through which adaptation and evolution can take place. Complete order would prevent adaptive changes; unconstrained disorder would disallow self-organization. In other words, quenched disorder have important consequences for the known issues related to environmental decoherence and quantum biological processes existing in a varying environment, allowing for stable biological structures.)

Also note that appearance implies observation. Therefore, observation at all levels is implied, it cannot be taken out of the picture at any scale.<sup>36</sup> Observation itself further implies sensory experience or qualia, more or less complex depending on scale. It is in this sense that our complexity approach is steeped in the underlying quantum nature of the universe which naturally merges into the participatory role of consciousness.3-7,36,37 Materiality, which really means an external reality of distinct objects, becomes important as we rise from the quantum to the classical realm (indeed, materiality defines that transition) (Fig. 2). But there is no fixed material "stuff" of which the universe is constructed. Thus, the self-organizing universe necessarily is a non-material universe.

#### **Fundamental Awareness in some metaphysical** systems

It is difficult to draw parallels between very different and/ or distant metaphysical systems given the cultural and linguistic specificities with which reports of first person experiences are expressed. This linguistic imprecision, in fact, was a primary factor in the rejection of metaphysics by the logical positivists. Nevertheless, the very transdisciplinary nature of conscious phenomena and connections to the physical, quantum world, require levels of imprecision and qualitative arguments. However, we assume the validity of inclusion of these first person accountings as championed by Varela and Shear: "[...]





Figure 1. Examples of scale dependent appearances—things vs. phenomena—of self-organizing systems. In self-organizing systems, whether the entities involved appear to be a thing vs. a process arising from the interaction of smaller things depends on the level of scale at which the system is observed. Thus, (A) a baitball of fish appears as an object, a "ball," at this level of scale, though it is clear from closer observation that the ball is made of interacting fish; likewise, the fish themselves, appear as solid entities at the everyday scale, but are recognized as emergent phenomena of interacting cells at the microscope level (Photographer: Christopher Swann). Another familiar example is how flocks of birds, in this case a murmuration of starlings (B), appear like moving, shifting objects in the sky, though they are clearly also interactions of the birds themselves, which in turn are emergent phenomena of interacting cells, etc (Photographer: Menahem Kahama, Getty Images).

dealing with subjective phenomena is not the same as dealing with purely private experiences, as is often assumed. The subjective is intrinsically open to intersubjective validation (second person interactivity), if only we avail ourselves of a method and procedure for doing so."39

Their "pragmatic" "method and procedure for doing so" involves acknowledging important caveats: the validity of first person experiences as data does not imply that they are privileged over other forms of experience; first person experiences worth studying are derived not from

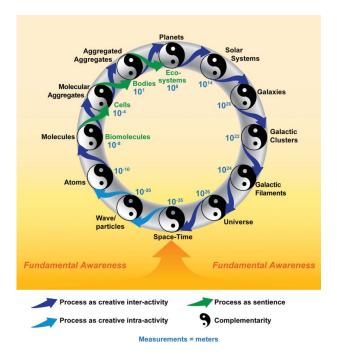


Figure 2. Schematic of the self-organizing universe as it arises from non-dual, Fundamental Awareness: a monistic, non-dual, field of pure awareness. The emergence of the dualistic universe from this Fundamental Awareness is characterized, at the first and all subsequent levels of scale, by process (as creative intraactivity in non-local scales, as creative inter-activity at higher, material scales, and as sentience in biological systems); complementarity; and recursion. As in some mathematical formulations of physical theory descriptions of existence (e.g., M-theory), the most small and the very largest scales are indistinguishable.

tentative or introductory applications of an introspective or contemplative practice, but from deep experience over time; methodologies that can provide "an open link to objective, empirically based description" must be developed. In regards this last point, in particular, it often "implies an intermediate mediation, a second-person position." Thus, Varela and Shear hope that "overall results should be to move toward an integrated or global perspective on mind where neither experience nor external mechanisms have the final word."

The "second person" mediation, in this sense, is exemplified, by the nature of teacher to student transmission of insights, validated by common experiences, by both participants. One doesn't read a book on "how to meditate" and then just do it; while occasional practitioners may have interesting experiences to report, the deep practice requires a second person perspective, i.e. a mediator who speaks to the practitioner's experience from within her own first person experience, the interaction, the reporting and response between the two serving to guide and develop a robust, deep, and usefully insightful set of experiences.

Through such iterative interactions, they reach a common framework and agreement, to then be integrated with third person investigations and hypothesis formation.

We describe insights from four such traditions selected not because of the particular clarity or authority with which these traditions speak, but because these are the ones with which the authors are most familiar from personal (first person) practice or through academic study of first person reports. What all of these share is that first person experiences point to what we would describe as an underlying, monistic, non-dual Fundamental Awareness. They are not the only formulations found in the larger diversity of metaphysical traditions in the world; indeed, even within single communities of belief, these experiences may be explained or described differently. Nonetheless, we find the commonalities between these different perspectives—and their resonance with our own personal experiences—to present a compelling case (bearing the above caveats in mind) for Fundamental Awareness as a framework for the nature of consciousness in the universe and the relationship between them.

#### **Vedic traditions**

Many Indian philosophical systems trace their origin to the ancient Vedas; in particular there is Vedanta. Within Vedanta there is Advaita Vedanta, which means non-dual Vedanta, perhaps the best-known school of non-duality, wherein Atman (the individual) and Brahman (the Absolute) are the same. The basic principles of nondual Vedanta are summarized in Adi Śankarā's Viveka Chudamani (Crest-Jewel of Discrimination) 39: a) "Brahman is Reality" b) "The world is an illusion" (Ishvara) and, c) "The individual Self is nothing but Brahman."

We note that Sankara's "illusion" is a term emphasizing that a separate world from Brahman is illusory. It does not deny objective reality, but instead means that a separate reality from the experience of consciousness is non-existent. To see the world as independent and separate from the Self (Brahman), is an illusion as it ultimately denies the very existence of Brahman, the nondual, monistic ground of existence.

The ancient system of Saivism also traces its origins to the Vedas and extends many of the principle concepts of Advaita Vedanta. In particular, modern Kashmiri Śaivism constitutes a body of philosophical teachings described as a Trika (triadic) system, consisting of Paramaśiva or supreme Śiva, the Absolute, undifferentiated Being (akin to Brahman); Śakti (universal Energy), also known as Citi (universal Consciousness,



as the creative power of the Absolute Being); and Nara, the individual soul. 40-42 The triadic teaching holds that there is no difference between Siva and Sakti/Citi, and in fact no difference between Consciousness which is the One Paramasiva/Citi and the individual; in other words this is a key point of departure from Advaita Vedanta. In the Saivist view, there is a kind of complementarity between the Absolute and the individual, between the ground of being and the existent universe as we perceive it.

Saivism is quite specific about levels of reality, processes and relationships which provide objective descriptions of basically subjective realms, the tattvas. This detail is in line with western scientific and philosophical approaches. Paramaśiva is Absolute Reality, the undifferentiated universal Being and substratum of all existence. As Citi, the creative energy of the Absolute Being, unfolds the universe without need of any substance other than Herself as pure Awareness, She (the Creatrix of the universe) is the ultimate source of all created manifestations, all objects, and all experiences of the subjective individual selves. As such, She is also the source of the mind. The dynamical aspect of Awareness, Citi, gives rise to countless beings and countless worlds. Citi represents the immanent aspect of existence, while Paramasiva is the transcendent aspect of existence, the pure Being.

#### Lurianic kabbalah

There are no singular, universal and authoritative views in Jewish texts or lore to define the nature of "God" and of God's relationship to the universe; the Biblical text and subsequent commentaries and embroiderings in the textual traditions are varied and inconsistent (though always colorful). However, a particular thread of discernment came with the development of Lurianic Kabbalah, the 16th century mystical tradition and practice system developed by Isaac Luria and his associates and disciples. 43,44 This system describes the Ayn Sof (variously: "without end," "without limitations," "infinite") as the non-dual, monistic substance out of which the world arises. The paradox of a finite world, with definable, dualistic qualities, arising from a non-dual infinity without features amenable to description is solved in this system by the concept of tzimtzum, or withdrawal, whereby Ayn Sof makes a (non-temperospatial) "clearing" into which the dualistic world can emanate. The emergence of our phenomenal world then proceeds to arise/manifest through four stages: Atzilut ("emanation"), B'riah ("creation"), Yetzirah ("formation") and Assiyut ("action").

#### **Buddhism**

We turn to a branch of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy/ practice called Dzogchen (related in content and practice to Chan/Zen Buddhism, whether not they had actual influence on each other's development). In Dzogchen, Rigpa is defined as a "reflexively self-aware primordial wisdom."45 Rigpa is the ultimate substratum of the "mind stream," consisting of clear and luminous awareness. Berzin describes this:

The subtlest level of mental activity (Mind), which continues with no beginning and no end, without any break, even during death and even into Buddhahood. It is individual and constitutes the mental continuum of each Being. It is naturally free of conceptual cognition, the appearance-making of true existence, and grasping for true existence, since it is more subtle than the grosser levels of mental activity with which these occur. It is named the Light.46

Also according to Berzin there are three aspects to

- 1. The essential nature of rigpa: primal purity. Rigpa is primordaly without stains, both being self-void and other-void;
- 2. The influencing nature of rigpa: the manner in which rigpa influences others. Rigpa is responsiveness. It responds effortlessly and spontaneously to others with compassion;
- 3. The functional nature of rigpa: rigpa effortlessly and spontaneously establishes "appearances."

The first of these reflects Rigpa's non-dual nature. The third reflects the spontaneous way in which it gives rise to the phenomenal world, i.e., it is not only the deepest substratum of mind, but also of the phenomenal world itself in which dualities and "appearances" arise.

#### **Fundamental Awareness**

# **Primary axioms**

Our approach to consciousness, this framework of Fundamental Awareness, thus rests on insights from QM and studies of self-organizing systems and reflects a decision to take "pure awareness," as it is described and refracted through the experiential lenses of the above (and other, undescribed) contemplative traditions as axiomatic. Thus, what we propose here, Fundamental Awareness, begins with these primary axioms:

- 1. The substratum of existence is Fundamental Awareness, i.e. pure awareness which is reflexively self-aware.
- 2. Fundamental Awareness is non-dual and nonmaterial.

How to define Fundamental Awareness immediately becomes a question for which, necessarily, all answers are inherently insufficient. As Fundamental Awareness is non-dual, any attempt to make a complete linguistic or mathematically formal system to define and describe it will inevitably contradict itself or, conversely, any consistent description, with words or mathematics, will necessarily be incomplete. And therefore, we would suggest, it can only be truly known experientially (as through metaphysical practices) rather than conceptually (through empirical science or philosophy). Nonetheless, we must try. So: if awareness may be generally defined as "the state of knowing or perceiving," Fundamental Awareness, tautologically, is "the state of knowing/perceiving the state of knowing/perceiving."

Some associated statements considered as refinements or commentaries then follow:

- 1. Emanation of the phenomenal universe is initiated by a first symmetry breaking wherein Fundamental Awareness, as it begins to manifest/perceive the possibility of Self and Other, moves from a self-reflexive "I Am" to "I and That," or Self and the Universe.
- 2. This primary symmetry breaking results in the dualistic phenomenal universe with the emanation of space-time, matter and energy.
- 3. The emergence of the dualistic universe from the non-dual Fundamental Awareness is characterized, at the first and all subsequent levels of scale, by process (as creative intra-activity in non-local scales, as creative inter-activity at higher, material scales, and as sentience in biological systems), complementarity and recursion (Fig. 2).

## Core principles of the self-organizing universe

The initial emanation of space and time, matter and energy that comprise both the initiating events (Big Bang) of the universe as well as its moment by moment maintenance represent the initiation of duality in contrast to the substratum of non-duality. This is complementarity, in Bohr's sense of the term, and one core principle of Fundamental Awareness, i.e., it is irreducibly present at every scale and from every perspective. One might ask, of course, whether this is truly fundamental because prior to the initiating symmetry break there is, by definition, no ability to assign qualities to the non-dual awareness, including complementarity. However, what pre-exists the initiating symmetry break is also therefore beyond description and, de facto, to describe it we are already an observer that has arisen from it. Our presence to interrogate its nature necessarily implies that this nondual pure awareness is in complementarity with the dual, phenomenal universe. Thus complementarity is fundamental in this sense.

At the Planck scale we still do not have a clear understanding of the nature of existence, though terms often applied with varying degrees of precision are quantum vacuum and quantum foam. The smallest entities that arise at this smallest scale, inclusive of quanta of space and time, of energy (and therefore matter, in whatever form[s] it manifests at this scale), interact with each other giving rise to acts of creation, to higher level, emergent structures. We refer to this as process (with scale and self-organizational subclasses to be further defined, below). These higher level structures (e.g. the particle/ wave entities of the Standard Model) can then interact to give rise to higher level structures and, therefore, the universe manifests in recursive patterns, unfurling as inflationary cooling allows for stability at every higher level of scale. Thus, these three principles—complementarity, process, and recursion—are seen operating together, working within and throughout the unified whole, the holarchy, of the cosmos and of its component parts, in many different ways, in the purely physical and biological realms.

## **Complementarity**

The concept of complementarity was first expressed for QM in Bohr's Como lectures.<sup>37</sup> It is so essential to understanding Bohr's Copenhagen Interpretation that Bohr actually referenced it in his own coat of arms with the Yin-Yang symbol. Essentially, quantum phenomena exhibit complementary aspects that are revealed by specific observational modes or perspectives, i.e. there are a range of possible states prior to observation and any single observation is unable to simultaneously capture all aspects of the complete physical situation.

Interestingly, it is often forgotten that Bohr also felt that complementarities existed at higher levels of scale, including the biological and cosmological realms.<sup>2,36</sup> He did not intend it to be a purely quantum organizing principle, although the emerging QM attracted most of his energies in the formulation of complementarity. We have described similar quantum-like complementarities in all larger scale structures.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, the nature of an observed "event" (to employ, intentionally, a Whiteheadian term)—thing vs. phenomenon arising from smaller things—depends on the selected observational scale.<sup>26,27</sup>

As a particular "horizon of knowledge" is approached, prescribed by a physical constant (e.g., Planck's quantum of action for the quantum scales; the speed of light for rapidly moving objects, etc.), complementary constructs need to be brought into the picture to present a fuller depiction of the underlying reality.<sup>8,35,47</sup> Far away from a horizon of knowledge, one of the constructs (e.g. classical mechanics) can operate well but close to the horizon,



classical description breaks down. At these levels, relativity or QM, has to be brought in.

In fact, the whole exists not at any single level of scale, nor in a hierarchy of systems, but, to use Koestler's term, 48 as a holarchy, a holistic (quantum-like) superposition of all levels of scale.

Thus, the bait ball of fish, described above; our bodies which are comprised of human and non-human cells. At the nanoscopic scale, cells themselves disappear from view to reveal atoms and molecules self-organizing in aqueous suspension. No single scale of observation can reveal the whole; at the moment selection is made of a scale of observation, the features of other levels of scale are hidden from view.35 which comprise the system. And such a holarchy privileges no particular scale as prime over any other. This is the same as the "part-whole complementarity" described by Nadeau and Kafatos. 49

Similarly, at cosmological scales, the horizons of knowledge are defined by the scale of the universe (the so-called Hubble radius) and the age of the universe (the Hubble age). As these scales are approached complementary constructs such as the open/closed universe; evolving/steady-state universe, single universe/multiverse, etc. emerge and are both needed to more fully describe the whole universe.<sup>8,47,49</sup> It is in this approach that the flat universe would be seen as the observational "choice" or middle way between these complementarities.

It is important to emphasize the role of observation when a horizon of knowledge is approached: Whereas far away from such a horizon, the behavior of objects is well described by an existing (single) perspective, as the limits of observation are reached, a single perspective cannot work anymore. On this basis, Kafatos and Nadeau (as well as others) have argued that the fine tuning in the universe cannot be understood until the observer is fully brought into the picture.<sup>8,47,49</sup>

We also emphasize that no scale dependent or perspective dependent view is prioritized or privileged over any other. They all have equal value, weight, or importance within the larger whole. For this reason "holarchy" is a preferred term to "hierarchy." There is no absolute hierarchy within all the (potentially infinite) sets of complementary pairs. Whatever hierarchy is presented, it is contextual and dependent on observational choices. As such, all complementarities exist in superposition. In the quantum realm these are "true" superpositions, in the classical world holarchy provides the corresponding, quantum-like concept.

A mathematical and logical reflection of these complementarities is that Gödel's incompleteness theorems apply.<sup>50</sup> Since the self-organizing features of any system can be modeled as an axiomatic system, Gödel's incompleteness theorems indicate that every modeling by an observer is necessarily incomplete. Alternate, complementary models are always necessary for successful capture of all the qualities of the entire system. Given that the entire cosmos reflects a holarchy which can at least hypothetically be modeled as such, however vast it is, complementarity is always, at every scale and within every scale, an irreducible feature. And thus it is, also, that we can acknowledge that the limitations on linguistic and mathematical definitions of the non-dual Fundamental Awareness are the very same limitations asserted by Gödel's incompleteness theorems.

#### **Process**

As noted, implicit in our understanding of the universe as a holarchy of self-organizing systems is that the entities comprising these systems, from quantum foam to cosmological scales, can interact with each other and thereby self-organize, giving rise to emergent structures at higher levels of scale. Thus, they are both interactive and creative. In this way, non-dual awareness gives rise to a dynamic, ever changing universe that is neither inert nor insentient (i.e., not a material entity as typically conceived in our culture). Broadly, we would consider this creative interactivity to be largely the same as that described by Alfred North Whitehead and, thus, choose the word process to describe the general class of these activities.<sup>50</sup> There are three forms of process we identify relating to different levels of scale and different modes of self-organization. While we have previously referred to all of these as "sentience" 30 we now restrict that word to biological entities.

Process may be described as involving three general activities:

- 1. sensing of the environment;
- 2. internal processing (within each entity) of the sensed information, necessarily a stochastic process (e.g., quantum stochasticity of the quantum realm at lower levels of scale, "quenched disorder" of complex systems at higher levels of scale);
- 3. emergence of a response.

These activities have distinctive features particular to different levels of scale, not only regarding the nature of stochasticy as part of the "internal processing," but also pertaining to other issues, such as non-locality. Thus, we would now apply three terms to these processes based on the scale of entities described and the nature of self-organization whereby entities produce new, emergent phenomena: creative intra-activity, creative inter-activity, and sentience.

## Process as creative intra-activity

In the quantum realm (meaning elements of the quantum foam and the tiers of subatomic particles of the Standard Model) non-locality pertains, so that while, as particles, each of the entities participating in the selforganizing may be considered a well-defined, i.e. bounded particle, they also, complementarily, are unbounded waves. Thus, the words "environment" and "internal" in the above definitions, in the quantum realm, are not reified as distinct domains separated by a distinct boundary. The environment is internal; the internal is environment. Non-locality leads these aspects to be complementary to each other. Thus, we chose intra-activity to describe this form of process. Its mediators comprise the fundamental tetrad of weak, strong, electromagnetic, and gravitational processes (though gravitation to probably a lesser extent, pending verifiable theories of "quantum gravity") (Table 1).

#### **Process as creative inter-activity**

As we move into higher levels of scale, such as those at which we find atoms and molecules, entities start to become more bounded. We are at the transition between the quantum realm and the classical world, a boundary which is arbitrary in the view of von Neumann.<sup>5</sup> While non-locality certainly applies to atoms and molecules, the "internal" aspect becomes more focused, shall we say. The external, while still extending as an infinite wave function with ever more distant, potential electron shells, their probability becomes rapidly minimized. Even more so for molecules and larger scale aggregates

of molecules. In all of these systems, the stochasticity of information processing is that of the quenched disorder of the quantum world. The primary mediators at this level of scale are weak and strong forces in the organization of nuclei and electromagnetism for evolution of electron shells and molecule associated electron clouds (Fig. 3).

Atoms and molecules can then begin to self-organize in two different ways. The first has been termed "thermodynamic complexity" by Peter Cariani<sup>51</sup> which results in most of the material aspects of the classical world: of stars, planets, and planetary fragments: water (ice, liquid or steam), rock (magma, lava, or solid), etc. Electromagnetism continues, of course, to be of primary relevance, though gravity now becomes a truly dominant effect (Figs. 2 and 3).

#### Process as sentience

The other mode by which atoms and molecules (and now biomolecules) self-organize is that of biological/living systems. This takes place when ions, molecules and biomolecules begin to self-organize in the liquid environments (aqueous environments on earth, at least) in which life arises. In these systems, process becomes what is readily apprehended as "sentience" (Figs. 2 and 3). 32-34,52,53 The boundary between inside and outside becomes a defining principle of living systems. The stochasticity within these structures, single cell or



Figure 3. Some mediators of process ("creative intra-activity," "creative interactivity" and "sentience") at different levels of scale and complexity. In the common view, non-locality predominates at the smallest, quantum levels of scale, in which realm we term the form of process "creative intra-activity;" at higher levels of scale, with the emergence of reified boundaries in which non-locality is superceded by materiality, process consists of "creative interactivity;" and, finally, in biological forms, process presents as true "sentience." (A recent "suggested" view indicates that non-locality is present throughout, but is "veiled;" see Kafatos and Kak<sup>60</sup>). Biomolecules, depending on the species, include molecules such as neurotransmitters, hormones, antibodies, leptins, etc. Cells may belong to organisms (e.g. immunocytes, neurons) or microbial flora living in synergistic mutualism (e.g., gut and skin flora). Nervous systems in multicellular organisms may be, for example, in the form of nerve nets in lower species like Radiata, or central and/or peripheral nervous systems in Bilatera. (Table adapted from Theise and Kafatos<sup>29</sup>)



multicellular organisms, we relate to the quenched disorder of complex systems at the "edge of chaos." 54 In cellular autopoietic systems, the internal processing is comprised of the self-organizing interactions of the organelles, molecules and ions within the cytoplasm and the cell wall/membrane (Fig. 3). Thus defined, sentience is not separate from the physical nature of the system, it is not something between or above or underlying the components of the system, it is the process itself occurring between the component parts as expressed at the level of the whole (Fig. 2).

We are left with some interesting possibilities for reframing old questions. Are the qualia each one of us experiences as "my mind" a reflection of the arising of sentience within levels of scale in which non-locality ceases to predominate and boundedness of systems becomes reified for some species into a sense of self and other, of separation? Is the "problem of consciousness" then, not only a reflection of the seeming, bounded nature of entities in the classical realm, but also of evolutionarily adaptive development - for some species - of a concept of self? After all, for some species, such as bees and ants, the "being which is sentient" seems to be at the level of the hive/colony rather than at the level of the individual. We would note, too, that these seeming boundaries are merely a reflection of complementarities between scales as we have previously emphasized, having no truly inherent existence.<sup>36</sup>

## Recursion

Recursion is a fact of both classical and quantum realms. Scale invariance is inherent in non-linear dynamical systems as evidenced by fractal structures, which apply to classical systems.<sup>24</sup> In general relativity, on the other hand, we have holographic information stored on the surface of a black hole; given that the universe in its entirety can be considered a black hole, the universe itself is holographic. 55-57 At the quantum realm, recursion operates in quantum statistics for both bosons and fermions. So, for example, the different spin (integer or half integer) quantum numbers for particles give rise to similar structures extending over many orders of magnitudes. Were it not for the Pauli principle, there would be no molecules and, therefore, no macro scale structures of any kind, living or otherwise. The Pauli principle is itself a consequence of quantum statistics, it applies to fermions (which are half-integer spin particles), a complementary type of statistics to classical statistics, wherein all particles are identical and no limitation as to how they bind together (in fact the very concept of binding is itself a quantum phenomenon) ever arises.

In biological organisms and subcomponents of them, such as neuronal systems, leaves, root systems, etc. fractal scaling operates over many orders of magnitude. In fact, dendritic patterns seem to be dominant in the brain, in trees, as well as streams of luminous matter connecting galaxies in clusters of galaxies, indicating an underlying principle which cannot be just assigned only to certain scales. Recursion, like complementarity and process, is present across all scales (as evidenced by the Universal Diagrams, Fig. 4). For example, the structure of objects made of bosons (integer spin particles) is also recursive but appears completely different from fermion-based structures. Fermions and bosons are also complementary and give rise to recursive structures, which are in creative interactivity with themselves and other surrounding structures.

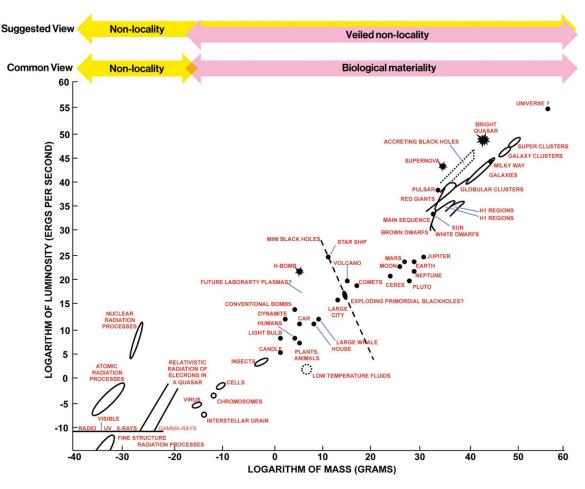
Recursion (accepting for the simplifying concept of temporal flow) can be thought of as "deriving" from complementarity combined with process. The quantum vacuum/quantum foam complementarity results in agents that, through creative intra-activity, creative inter-activity or sentience, create higher level emergent structures; these in turn create a higher level of emergent entities on upward to the highest scales of the Universal Diagrams.

Two special features of these concepts, related to quantum "weirdness," need to be emphasized. The first is that from the perspective of the Quantum Vacuum the universe is actually atemporal, existing in a kind of grand, all-encompassing, holarchical simultaneity, the flow of time being more a function of our human nervous systems and the stories they create, than of the physics which describe the world. The second is that the very large is contained in the very small and the very small in the very large (Fig. 2). This is the basic understanding involving superstrings: the universe comprises them but is also composed of them.<sup>58</sup> And in fact, here we again encounter non-locality (in the superstring field) and locality (giving rise to particles and all local objects in the universe). As has been said: "As above, so below."

# **Fundamental Awareness and the three domains** of inquiry

#### Scientific domain

Fundamental Awareness is wholly in keeping with the orthodox von Neumann interpretation of QM. It encompasses all established contemporary sciences through the lens of self-organizing systems at all levels of scale, including living and non-living systems. There are no contradictions between Fundamental Awareness and contemporary science.



**Figure 4.** A universal diagram of luminous power radiated as a function of mass of objects in the universe. The scales extend over 70–100 orders of magnitude, from the quantum realm to the universe. Note the tight relationship followed by most objects (diagonally, bottom left to top right) with bright, explosive events and quanta being outside the main diagonal relationship. Similar diagrams can be drawn for other physical parameters of objects.

That being said, however, there are insights of value from this perspective. The first, already mentioned, is that the universe is inherently non-material. *Materiality is merely a scale dependent phenomenon*. To reify this materialist perspective as the only "scientific" view—as do many contemporary, self-proclaimed "skeptics"—is in fact to take a non-scientific stance, wholly in keeping with the ideas of Logical Positivists which have been thoroughly and rigorously undermined by their own quiet, backbencher, Platonist Kurt Gödel. The emergence of locality from non-locality, also recently referred to as "veiled non-locality," of the appearance of materiality from the non-material, is a readily demonstrable property of the known universe. 61

Likewise, boundaries between objects are scale dependent as well which has implications for design of experimental systems, the acceptance of which necessitates a move from the purely reductionist scientific approaches toward a systems approach, particularly when considering biology.<sup>35</sup> Such a shift of methodology and focus is

already clear as systems theory finds ready applications throughout the sciences in this millennium. A fuller consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in prior published discussions.<sup>36</sup>

The axiomatic approach to Fundamental Awareness we begin to express herein also provides interesting possibilities for mathematization that we hope will lead to formal statements with computational and predictive power. Possible ways in which this may be accomplished, for example, include modeling the initiating symmetry break and the emergence of self/other dualities through Hilbert space analyses and applications of sheaf theoretic algebraic topology and category theory.

Currently, Kafatos has developed a mathematical formalism that ties together the observer with the observed in the most primary of relationships, the I Am and all derivatives such as I Am That statements. In summary, the mathematical formalism accepts the view that awareness is primary, operating through the three principles discussed in the present

work, all of which apply at all scales. Five logical statements are developed wherein the object and the subject are unified but in consecutive steps, the beginning of differentiation is set up. As such, the mathematics allows for a rudimentary formalism of the qualia of experience that is a simplified version of Hilbert space convention encountered in quantum mechanics, using the bra and the ket generalized vectors corresponding to the subject and the object. This approach has the advantage of bringing forward a familiarity with quantum formalism.

As quantum mechanics is the only physics we have that fundamentally relates to observation, the connection to Hilbert space is natural. The mathematical formalism does, however, go beyond specific interpretations of quantum mechanics and has strong philosophical foundations in Western philosophy as well as monistic systems of the East. Kafatos explores the full development of this axiomatic mathematical approach through when the identity of object and subject breaks down.<sup>62</sup>

### **Metaphysical domain**

Fundamental Awareness and the core principles of complementarity, process, and recursion, along with the principles inherent in a self-organizing universe find a surprising array of reflections back to the metaphysical systems described above. In mapping concepts across these different domains, we show that Fundamental Awareness is capable of providing a language for mediating the cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary interchanges.

#### **Vedic traditions**

In the Vedic traditions, as we have noted, there is tension between some of the concepts of Advaita Vedanta and Saivism. In the former, the ground of being, Brahman, is the "real" and everything of the phenomenal world arising from that is illusion, Ishvara; in the latter, the ground of being, Paramsiva, is identical with all aspects of the phenomenal world, Sakti. The tension between these concepts dissolves in the view of Fundamental Awareness in which complementarity is an irreducible aspect. Complementary states that these views are not in a relationship of either/or, but one of both/and. The Advaita Vedantist point of view is merely the complementary aspect of the Saivist view.

The detail of the Saivist view now also begins to illuminate the process whereby the non-dual substratum of reflexive awareness gives rise to the dual nature of the phenomenal universe. It is not through a sudden, cusplike emanation in which the non-dual arises all at once. Rather, there is a process even within this emanation. The first 5 pure levels of the Saivist scheme reveal this

unfolding as the non-dual, awareness of awareness ("I-Am") generates three sequential levels of separation leading to duality ("I-[Am]-That" or Unlimited Will; "That-[Am]-I" or Unlimited Knowledge; and I-Am-That or Unlimited Action). This process does not, however, lead to a full differentiation until the great power of limitation, Maya, limits the unlimited powers of I-ness, giving rise to space and time and still higher levels of tattvas. These processes are amenable to mathematical formalism (see above) and therefore may potentially lead to a truly formal statement of a theory of Fundamental Awareness.

#### Buddhism

Having stirred Buddhist views of "mind" and "awareness" into our formulation of Fundamental Awareness and the self-organizing nature of the universe that emanates from the substratum of self-reflexive awareness, we can then, in turn, use the concepts of this view to shed light on other Buddhist metaphysical concepts (summarized in Table 1).63,64 For example, the fact that the nature of emergent structure(s) depend(s) on every creatively interacting member of every component of the holarchy is another way of stating the Buddhist notion of "interdependence." Given that quenched disorder/limited randomness is an inherent aspect in creative interactions at all levels of scale (providing the adaptive capacities that make living systems alive), there is an inevitability of mass extinction events, i.e., "impermanence." The fundamental nature of complementarity is a direct statement of the Buddhist concept of "emptiness of inherent existence." And that all interactive is creative, recursively giving rise to higher level scales of entities which in turn are creatively interactive, is analogous to Buddhist notions of Karmic law, that all effects are dependent on prior causes and these effects, themselves, then become the causes of future effects.

#### Lurianic kabbalah

One of the paradoxes of this Kabbalistic view of creation is that what links us and our world to the divine is also

Table 1. Comparison of complexity concepts of the universe with corresponding Buddhist concepts.

Buddhist Concepts
Emptiness of inherent existence
Impermanence
Interdependence
Karmic law of cause and effect

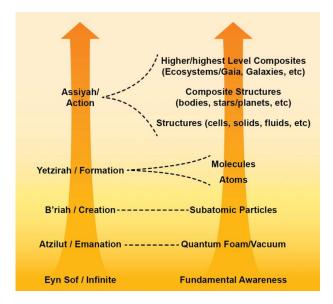


Figure 5. Complementary structures and parallel, recursive processes of Lurianic Kabalah and contemporary science. The terms for the recursive emergence of the universe from the Eyn Sof actually reflect our scientific understandings. Atzilut/emanation: the Planck scale, dual universe emanates directly from the non-dual rather than being comprised of lower scale creatively interacting units; B'riah/creation: the Planck scale units, through creative interactivity, literally create material from the non-material, an apparent "ex nihilo" though only apparent; Yetzirah/formation—the material substance of the universe now creatively interacts as atoms and molecules to create larger scale structures (including biologies); Assiyah/doing—the everyday world of activities, reified notions of self and other which allow evolutionary, adaptive behaviors.

what precludes our easy, direct experience of the divine. It is very similar to the issues raised in Vedic traditions regarding the relationship between Brahman/Isvara, Siva/Sakti. As in those traditions, the principle of complementarity illuminates this paradox, since the simultaneous linking to the Eyn Sof and its concealment from view relate to the scale dependent nature of existence (Fig. 5). Of particular interest is that the terms for the recursive emergence of the universe from the Eyn Sof actually reflect our scientific understandings. Atzilut/ emanation: the Planck scale, dual universe emanates directly from the non-dual rather than being comprised of lower scale creatively interacting units; B'riah/ creation: the Planck scale units, through creative intraactivity, literally create material from the non-material, an apparent "ex nihilo"—though only apparent; Yetzirah/formation—the material substance of the universe now creatively interacts as atoms and molecules to create larger scale structures; Assiyah/doing—the everyday world of activities, reified notions of self and other which allow evolutionary, adaptive behaviors.

The concept of tzimtzum<sup>43</sup> is also illuminated by the concepts of Foundational Awareness, refracted back through the Shaivist teachings: the transition from the non-dual to the dual involves, in the language of Kabbalah, a "withdrawal." This seems no different than that of the Saivist progress from I-Am to I-Am-That. Both are the progression from seamless non-duality into a perceived, complementary state of Self and Other.

### Philosophical domain

While Fundamental Awareness may be considered a core concept, or rather a core experience of metaphysical traditions, the concept of a universal conscious plenum in Western philosophy was by no means excluded from scientific discourse until the recent exception of the 20th mid-century onwards. However, various aspects of Fundamental Awareness can be correlated with understandings from diverse eras and stances.

Fundamental Awareness is, clearly, a form of monistic idealism. As such, it has clear relationships to other forms of idealism, reflective of some Platonic and neo-Platonic thought. In terms of Platonism, specifically, we believe that the mathematical structures that will be used to formalize the emanation of the dual universe from the non-dual, are equivalent to the Platonic ideals.<sup>67</sup> It should therefore come as no surprise that the features of complementarity are reflective of and reflected in the incompleteness theorems of that supreme modern Platonist, Kurt Gödel. It is also certainly compatible with aspects of the German idealism of Kant, Schopenhauer and others that were perhaps the dominant philosophical perspectives in the 19th century. This remained a useful view for many orthodox scientists in the 20th century not only the founders generation of QM (Einstein not withstanding)—but other prominent scientists as well, even as logical positivism came to hold increasingly popular sway. For example, as Sir James Jeans stated:



The stream of knowledge is heading toward a nonmechanical reality; the Universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears to be an accidental intruder into the realm of matter we ought rather hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.65

And, of course Fundamental Awareness is a form of monism. Thus, Fundamental Awareness can be seen as staunchly within the tradition of that supreme rationalist Spinoza's world view and his "one substance." Interestingly, the first and most vociferous direct critique of Spinoza, that of Leipniz' monadology, while purporting to offer a distinctly opposing view can, instead, be seen to be in direct (fundamental) complementarity to the views of Spinoza.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the Fundamental Awareness framework and its core principles provide links to important Western philosophical traditions, but also have the potential to clarify strong, but theoretically contradictory positions, through the instantiation of the complementarity principle.

Particular attention should be paid to two important contemporary theories/philosophies of consciousness: "Orch OR" of Hameroff and Penrose<sup>68</sup> and the Conscious Realism of Donald Hoffman.<sup>69</sup> In both of these views, small or smallest interactive units are imbued with some form of proto-consciousness, the self-organizing assembly of which into larger scale structures results in what we take to be consciousness, however defined, in whatever species context. A significant difference between these models and Fundamental Awareness is that this current framework specifies what can be known about this proto-consciousness and what must remain unknown. What is known: it is non-material, pure, non-dual reflexive self-awareness. Beyond that, nothing about it can be described. To call this "proto-" consciousness is to relegate it to so simplified a form of consciousness that it cannot even be recognized as consciousness, per se; on the other hand, we would argue that it is, in fact, the most all-encompassing, universal manifestation of consciousness.

However, beyond these differences, Fundamental Awareness does not, in fact, inherently contradict either Orch OR or Conscious Realism; rather, these models may be considered further specifications of some possible modes of the process we label "creative interactivity." So, for example, we view sentience to be a specific form of creative interactivity arising in the subclass of self-organizing, biological entities, i.e. those considered to be alive. Likewise, these other approaches offer specific mechanisms of creative interactivity between the specified interacting agents: wave/particle entities at the lowest levels of scale (Hoffman's conscious agents) or

between material structures (microtubules) and Platonic values embedded in space-time (Orch OR). These creative interactions, in both models, then propagate recursively through higher levels of scale as described by their authors. Thus, both models, in conjunction with Fundamental Awareness, demonstrate mechanisms whereby self-assembly allows – or even mandates – evolution first of living systems themselves, and then of species specific consciousness such as that shared by humans.

We also note that all fundamental mathematics, including algebraic geometry, category theory, etc. from which Hilbert space algebra arises, are as close as possible to Fundamental Awareness, as they reveal more primary relationships rather than models of physical or even mental realms.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the three principles that are part and parcel of the mathematics, constitute the primary qualia as all qualia or conscious experiences are based on the subject-object relationship.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, one cannot speak about Fundamental Awareness without reference to the most fully and rigorously developed philosophical system which embraces rather than hides from the implications of orthodox QM, namely, the work of Alfred North Whitehead. 50,70 As he stated in Science in the Modern World:

There persists. [a] fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread through space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a material is senseless, valueless, purposeless. It just does what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being. It is this assumption that I call "scientific materialism." Also it is an assumption which I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited to the scientific situation at which we have now arrived. 70

His view was that things, per se, are not the units of existence, but rather that processes and events—embodying creativity and freedom (which we see as reflective of universal, but limited randomness in self-organizing systems that allows for recursion)—are the fundamentals of existence. Thus we have adopted Whitehead's process as one of the fundamental principles of Fundamental Awareness. Moreover, we suggest that sensing, internal processing, and responding, activities comprising our versions of process, as described above, are another way of describing Whitehead's concrescence.

Whitehead also refers to three notions of the Category of the Ultimate: creativity, many, and one. The creativity he describes is none other than that which we ascribe to Fundamental Awareness. The relationship of his many to the one and his one to the many is none other than what we recognize as the overarching global form of complementarity as well as smaller complementarities between adjacent levels of scale.

Thus, both Process Philosophy of Whitehead and our Fundamental Awareness framework emphasize continual becoming rather than a static, instantiated being. Further evaluation of the relationships of key themes of Whiteheadian philosophy and Fundamental Awareness, in particular an elaboration of how his "ontological principle" relates to the themes of Fundamental Awareness are beyond the limited scope of this summary paper, but merit deeper, more detailed exploration.

## If qualia are all there is

We thus offer this Fundamental Awareness framework, in which an axiomatic, pure, self-reflexive, non-dual awareness is the substratum of existence. With pure awareness itself as the fundamental root from which all phenomena emerge, a proper understanding of human qualia reflects that qualia are not a "hard problem" to solve, but the foundational nature of all existence—every field, every wave/particle, every atom and molecule, every living and non-living aggregate of such, anything and everything observed, experienced, or imagined is, in fact, nothing but qualia within the awareness that is the ground of existence. In this view the human brain is not the creator of our conscious experiences, but the transducer of the fundamental, non-dual, non-material awareness into our own, personal, human minds.

The new hard problem, though perhaps not quite so hard, is how to understand the structures and mechanisms whereby the human brain transduces awareness into what we experience as our individual minds. The well-known radio metaphor is of use here: a radio transduces radio waves into (usually) sound (though other outputs are possible) as the brain transduces awareness into the specificities of our human minds. The "neural correlates of consciousness" are not clues to how the brain creates awareness, but to how the brain transduces awareness. A second new hard problem immediately follows: how can the human brain itself be constructed of the very awareness from which it arises? To extend the metaphor: what are the implications of a radio constructed from radio waves?

These notions also raise the question of what kinds of transducers and transductions exist in the universe. Are only human brains capable of this? Are some other mammalian brains (e.g. dolphins, elephants, porpoises) capable of it? All central nervous systems? All nervous systems? All living things, single celled or multicellular (as per autopoietic theory)? So, not surprisingly, qualia are species dependent. The appearances of a wall to a

bacterium, to a bat, to a human, are not the same. But in the end, the same laws of quantum physics apply to all species. All species would interact with quanta, whether through the visual, auditory or other sensory systems. Even the apparent division of the world into objects is itself bound to the specific structures and mechanisms of species specific sensory-nervous systems. Given that the human brain can be trained to experience the world without such divisions into separate objects, of self and others (mystical experiences of "one-ness," of "the Absolute"), might there be species for which that view is actually normative?

### **Conclusions**

Fundamental Awareness is not only consistent within the complete framework of 21st century knowledge, but is more complete in its inclusivity of that complete framework than other models; in fact, no aspect of contemporary scientific investigation is potentially left out. It offers a self-consistent framework to reflect the implied wholeness of the universe (that science assumes in its operational workings). Moreover, prominent emergentist theories of consciousness, such as autopoietic theory<sup>32</sup> or integrated information theory,69 are not invalidated by Fundamental Awareness, but may be viewed as possible elucidations and specifications of the ways in which process, complementarity, and recursion are involved in manifestations of consciousness in particular settings and scales, namely those within biological systems. Furthermore, leading panpsychist approaches, such as Orch OR and Conscious Realism may likewise be seen as specifications of processes and mechanisms within the overall framework of Fundamental Awareness.

This framework is also fully reflective of substantial lines of Western philosophical thought from Plato to Spinoza to Kant to Schopenhauer to Whitehead and Gödel and can, we believe, provide useful conceptual and linguistic bridges to the philosophical domains of discourse. It also further emphasizes the emptiness of the arguments for scientific materialism. The utility of this shift in stance is the recognition of areas for scientific study that remain outside the currently acceptable bounds of scientific discourse, important areas such as biofields, Psi phenomena, and non-Western methods of health and healing. 72-74 Likewise Fundamental Awareness creates a set of concepts, images, and terminology that can, as we have shown, potentiate dialog between Western philosophical and scientific traditions and metaphysical insights derived from an array of Western and non-Western culture. Thus, all three domains with a stake in the understanding of consciousness can find useful, translational modes of thought and expression in

Fundamental Awareness to further consciousness studies in the coming years.

In summary, Fundamental Awareness is a formalized version of an oft-stated, though as often neglected point of view: that non-dual awareness is foundational to the universe, not arising from the interactions or structures of higher level phenomena. This framework, based on the most rigorous, successful insights of contemporary science and mathematics, shows that the universe is non-material, self-organizing throughout, comprised of a holarchy of complementary, process driven, recursive phenomena. The universe is both its own first observer and subject. The cosmos therefore, can be understood to derive from awareness rather than being suffused by it or giving rise to it. To say that the world is non-material and composed, a priori, of awareness is to privilege information over materiality, action over agency. In such manner, a proper understanding of human qualia reflects that qualia are not a "hard problem" to solve, but the foundational nature of all existence. All views and experiences are, in fact, nothing but qualia within the awarenessness that is the ground of existence.

## Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

## **Acknowledgments**

We are very grateful for figure art provided by Jill K Gregory, MFA, CMI (Manager, Academic Medical Illustrator, Mount Sinai Health System, New York, NY, USA) and for generous and constructive insights from Deepak Chopra, Subhash Kak, Bernardo Kastrup, and William Bushell.

### References

- [1] Chalmers D. Facing up to the problem of consciousness. J Consciousness Studies 1995; 2:200-19.
- [2] Bohr N. The quantum postulate and the recent development of atomic theory. Nature 1928; 121:580-90; http:// dx.doi.org/10.1038/121580a0
- [3] Stapp H. Quantum theory and the role of mind in nature. Found of Phys 2001; 31:1465-99; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1023/A:1012682413597
- [4] Stapp H. Mindful universe: quantum mechanics and the participating observer. New York: Springer-Verlag; 2007.
- [5] von Neumann J. Mathematical foundations of quantum mechanics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press;
- [6] Wigner EP. Symmetries and reflections: scientific essays of Eugene P. Wigner. Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press; 1967.
- [7] Heisenberg W. Physics and philosophy. New York, New York: Harper & Row; 1958.

- [8] Kafatos M, Nadeau R. The conscious universe: parts and wholes in physical reality. New York, New York: Springer-Verlag; 2000.
- Monroe C, Meekhof DM, King BE, Wineland DJ. Science 1996; 272:1131; PMID:8662445; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1126/science.272.5265.1131
- [10] Einstein A, Podolsky B, Rosen N. Can quantum-mechanical description of physical reality be considered complete? Phys Rev 1935; 47:777; http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/ PhysRev.47.777
- [11] Ringbauer M, Duffus B, Branciard C, Cavalcanti EG, White AG, Fedrizzi A. Nat Phy 2015; 11:249-54; http:// dx.doi.org/10.1038/nphys3233
- [12] Ma XS, Zotter S, Kofler J, Ursin R, Jennewein T, Brukner Č, Zeilinger A. Experimental delayed-choice entanglement swapping. Nature Physics 2012; 8:479-84.
- [13] Megidish E, Halevy A, Shacham T, Dvir T, Dovrat L, Eisenberg HS. Entanglement swapping between photons that have never coexisted. Physical Rev Letters 2013; 110:210403; http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/ PhysRevLett.110.210403
- [14] Lemos GB, Borish V, Cole GD, Ramelow S, Lapkiewicz R, Zeilinger A. Quantum imaging with undetected photons. Nature 2014; 512:409-12; PMID:25164751; http://dx.doi. org/10.1038/nature13586
- [15] Lee KC, Sprague MR, Sussman BJ, Nunn J, Langford NK, Jin XM, Champion T, Michelberger P, Reim KF, England D, et al. Entangling macroscopic diamonds at room temperature. Science 2011; 334:1253-6; PMID:22144620; http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1211914
- [16] Bell JS. Speakable and unspeakable in quantum mechanics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1988; 14 p.
- [17] Bohm D, Aharonov Y. Discussion of experimental proof for the paradox of Einstein, Rosen, and Podolsky. Phys Rev 1957; 108:1070-1076; http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/ PhysRev.108.1070
- [18] Aspect A, Grangier P, Roger G. Experimental realization of Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen-Bohm gedankenexperiment: a new violation of Bell's inequalities. Phys Rev Lett 1982; 49:91-4; http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.49.91
- [19] Tittel W, Brendel J, Zbinden H, Gisin N. Violation of Bell inequalities by photons more than 10 km apart. Physical Review Letters 1998; 81:3563-6; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1103/PhysRevLett.81.3563
- [20] Friedman M. Reconsidering logical positivism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999.
- [21] Richardson AW. The scientific world conception: logical positivism, in Baldwin T, editor, The Cambridge history of philosophy, 1870-1945. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2003:391-400. pp
- [22] Kurakin A. Self-organization vs Watchmaker: stochastic gene expression and cell differentiation. Dev Genes Evol 2005; 215:46-52; PMID:15645318; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1007/s00427-004-0448-7
- [23] Kurakin A. Self-organization versus Watchmaker: stochastic dynamics of cellular organization. Biol Chem 2005; 386:247-254; PMID:15843170; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1515/BC.2005.030
- [24] Kurakin A. Self-organization versus Watchmaker: molecular motors and protein translocation. Biosystems 2006; 84:15-23; PMID:16384632.

- [25] Kurakin A. Scale-free flow of life: on the biology, economics, and physics of the cell. Theor Biol Med Model 2009; 6:6; PMID:19416527; http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/ 1742-4682-6-6
- [26] Kurakin A. The self-organizing fractal theory as a universal discovery method: the phenomenon of life. Theor Biol Med Model 2011; 8:4-66; PMID:21447162; http://dx. doi.org/10.1186/1742-4682-8-4
- [27] Theise ND. Now you see it, now you don't. Nature 2005; 435:1165; PMID:15988502; http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/ 4351165a
- [28] Theise ND. Implications of 'post-modern biology' for pathology: the cell doctrine. Lab Invest 2006; 86:335-44; PMID:16482099; http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/labinvest.3700401
- [29] Theise ND, Harris R. Postmodern biology: (adult) (stem) cells are plastic, stochastic, complex, and uncertain. Handb Pharmacol Exp 2006; 174:389-408; PMID:16370336.
- [30] Theise ND, Kafatos M. Sentience everywhere: complexity theory, panpsychism & the role of sentience in self-organization of the universe. J Consciousness Exploration Res 2013; 4:378-90.
- [31] Guth A. The inflationary universe: the quest for a new theory of cosmic origins. New York, New York: Perseus; 1997.
- [32] Linde A. Particle physics and inflationary cosmology. Contemp Concepts Phys 2005; 5:1-362.
- [33] Maturana H, Varela F. Autopoiesis and cognition: the realization of the living," in Cohen RS, Wartofsky MW, editors, Boston studies in the philosophy of science. Dordecht D. Reidel Publishing Co; 1980.
- [34] Thompson E. Mind in life: biology, phenomenology, and the sciences of mind. Boston: Harvard University Press; 2007.
- [35] Varela F, Thompson E, Rosch E. Embodied mind: cognitive science and human experience. Boston, Massachusetts:MIT Press; 1991.
- [36] Theise ND, Kafatos M. Complementarity in biological systems. Complexity 2013; 18:11-20; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1002/cplx.21453
- [37] Bohm D. Wholeness and the implicate order. New York: Routledge Press; 1980.
- [38] Bohr N. Causality and complementarity. Philosophy Science 1937; 4:289-98; http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/286465
- Varela FJ, Shear J. First-person methodologies: what, why, how? J Consciousness Studies 1999; 6:1-14.
- [40] Prabhavananda S, Isherwood C. Shankara's crest-jewel of discrimination (Viveka-chudamani) by Śańkarācārya. Hollywood, California: Vedanta Press; 1978.
- [41] Dyczkowski MSG. Spandakārikā ("The Stanzas of Vibration"). Varanasi: Dilip Kumar Publishers; 1994.
- [42] Dyczkowski MSG. The Aphorisms of Śiva. Albany, New York: SUNY Press; 1992.
- [43] Singh J. Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam ("The Secret of Self-recognition"). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass; 1980.
- [44] Scholem G. Major trends in Jewish mysticism; New York: Schocken Books; 1941.
- [45] Idel M. Kabbalah: new perspectives. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; 1988.
- [46] Klein AC, Wangyal T. Unbounded wholeness. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2006.
- [47] Berzin A. Berzin Archives Glossary. Source (March 6, 2008): http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/about/glos sary/glossary.html\_80737397.html

- [48] Kafatos M. Complementary and cosmology, in: Kafatos M, editor. Bell's theorem, quantum theory and conceptions of the universe. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers; 1989:195-210 pp.
- [49] Koestler Arthur. The ghost in the machine. New York, New York: Penguin Group: 1999.
- [50] Nadeau R, Kafatos M. The non-local universe: the new physics and matters of the mind. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1999.
- [51] Nagel E, Newman JR. Gödel's proof. Revised edition, Hofstadter DR, editor. New York: New York University Press: 2002.
- [52] Whitehead AN. Process and reality. New York: The Free Press; 1978.
- [53] Cariani P. On the design of devices with emergent semantic functions. PhD thesis, Doctor of Philosophy in Advanced Technology in the Graduate School of the State University of New York at Binghamton; 1989.
- [54] Thompson E. Life and mind: From autopoiesis to neurophenomenology. A tribute to Francisco Varela. Phenomenol Cognitive Sci 2004; 3:381-98; http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1023/B:PHEN.0000048936.73339.dd
- [55] Margulis L, Sagan D. "Sentient symphony," in The nature of life: classical and contemporary perspectives from philosophy and science. Bedau MA, Cleland CE, editors. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2010:340-354 pp.
- [56] Lewin, R. Complexity: Life at the edge of chaos. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press; 1999.
- [57] 't Hooft G. Dimensional reduction in quantum gravity. arXiv:gr-qc/9310026; 1993.
- [58] Susskind L. The World as a Hologram. J Mathematical Physics 1995; 36:6377-96; http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/ 1.531249
- [59] Bousso R. The holographic principle. Rev Modern Physics 2002; 74:825-874. 58. Greene, B. The elegant universe: superstrings, hidden dimensions, and the quest for the ultimate theory. New York, New York: Vintage Series, Random House Inc; 2000.
- [60] Goldstein R. Incompleteness: the proof and paradox of Kurt Gödel. New York: W. W. Norton & Company; 2005.
- Kafatos M, Kak S. Veiled nonlocality and cosmic censorship. 2014; arXiv:1401.2180.
- Kafatos MC. Fundamental mathematics of consciousness. J Natural Social Philosophy 2015; 11:1-14.
- [63] Theise ND. Microscopes and mystics: a response to Stuart Kauffman's "Call to Re-Enchantment." 2016 [In press]
- [64] Theise ND. From the bottom up: complexity, emergence, and Buddhist metaphysics. Tricycle 2006; 15:24-26.
- [65] Jeans J. The Mysterious Universe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1937:137 p.
- [66] Spinoza B. Ethics, in Edwin Curley, translator, The collected writings of Spinoza. Volume I. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1985.
- [67] Stewart M. The Courtier and the heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the fate of god in the modern world. New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press; 2006.
- [68] Hameroff S, Penrose R. Reply to criticism of the 'Orch OR qubit' - 'Orchestrated objective reduction' is scientifically justified. Physics of Life Rev 2014; 11:94-100; http:// dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.plrev.2013.11.013



- [69] Hoffman DD. Conscious realism and the mind-body problem. Mind Matter. 2008; 6:87-121.
- [70] Whitehead AN. Science and the modern world. New York: Macmillan Company; 1925.
- [71] Tononi G, Koch C. Consciousness: here, there and everywhere? Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society London B; 2015.
- [72] Bushell WC, Olivo EL, Theise ND, editors. Longevity and optimal health: integrating eastern and western perspectives.
- Annals of the New York Academy of Medicine. New York New York: New York Academy of Medicine; 2009.
- [73] Kafatos MD, Chevalier G, Chopra D, Hubacher J, Kak S, Theise ND. Biofield science: current physics perspectives. Global Adv Health Med. 2015; 4(suppl):25-34; http://dx. doi.org/10.7453/gahmj.2015.011.suppl
- [74] Radin DI. The conscious universe: the scientific truth of psychic phenomena. New York, New York: Harper Collins; 2009.