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THE INWARD MOMENT:  
PAUL TILLICH, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY  
IN AMERICAN THOUGHT, 1945-1965

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And approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Inward Moment:  
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Standing at the intersection of intellectual history, religious history, and the history of psychology, this dissertation examines the German-American Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and, through him, the encounter between religion and psychoanalysis in American thought after the Second World War. Tillich was a public intellectual, a minor academic celebrity, and a broker in the mid-twentieth-century rapprochement between the liberal Protestant ministry and the therapeutic helping professions, especially psychoanalysis. Tillich incorporated Freudian and existentialist insights about human nature into his theological outlook while also offering sharp critiques of depth psychology in its purely secular forms. In successive chapters, this dissertation details Tillich's psychoanalytic critique of religious moralism, his dialogues with secular psychotherapists, his complex and tumultuous inner life, and his influence on pluralist and post-Protestant religious trends that emerged during his later years. Throughout, I aim to portray Tillich's biography as well as his theological and psychological thought against the backdrop of his intellectual milieu in post-World War II America, an environment that I label the "inward moment."

## Dedication

To my mother, sister, and ex-wife

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**PROLOGUE, 1920:****SIGMUND FREUD AND PAUL TILlich IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR**

Psychoanalysis and theology represent two distinct modes – sometimes rivalrous, potentially complimentary – of reckoning with the inevitable disasters of human existence, the conflicts of the inner life, and the anxiety of having to die. It is not surprising that the experience of war should have shaped their separate development or played a role in fostering the significant and underappreciated dialogue that has gone on between them. The First World War marked a turning point in the thought of the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, as well as in that of the twentieth century's most creative Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich. The two men, to be sure, belonged to different generations and experienced the Great War from radically different vantages. Freud, a fifty-eight-year-old Viennese Jewish neurologist, had already founded the psychoanalytic movement and become an international celebrity when hostilities between the European powers broke out in 1914. Tillich, the twenty-eight-year-old son of a Lutheran clergyman from Eastern Prussia, was an unknown in public life who had recently received doctorates in theology and philosophy, presided ineffectually over a working-class parish in Berlin, and married the daughter of a family friend. Freud remained in Vienna during the war, tending to his patients, managing his family affairs through wartime scarcity, and worrying over the fate of his two sons in the Austro-Hungarian military. Tillich, who had enlisted in the German army as a chaplain, saw ferocious combat at the front, presided at the funerals of several of his close friends, and

wrangled with his superior officers over pastoral questions in his regiment. There is no evidence or suggestion that the two men ever met each other.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Freud and Tillich's thinking on the meaning of the war – for the civilization of bourgeois Europe and for what it said about human nature more broadly – ran along similar lines. The grieving and apocalyptic mood that they evinced, which would resurface repeatedly and intermittently among continental intellectuals in the coming decades, was indeed pervasive at the time.<sup>2</sup> Freud greeted the end of the fighting – together with the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires – with a combination of foreboding, stoicism, and rueful acknowledgement that the old order had been corrupt. “It is good,” he wrote to a friend as it became clear that an Allied victory was imminent, “that the old should die, but the new is not yet here.” His daughter Sophie's unexpected death in 1920 – from the Spanish Flu pandemic that swept Europe following the end of the war – appeared to Freud as “a senseless, brutal act of fate” after the relief of not having lost either of his sons, an event which he had been preparing himself for throughout the war years. “One must bow one's head under the blow,” he wrote to a friend, “as a helpless, poor human being with whom higher powers are playing.”<sup>3</sup>

Tillich's reaction to the catastrophe was angrier and more political, but similar in emotional tenor. He became convinced early on that the war would “last indefinitely and ruin all Europe”; the religious optimism that had inspired him to

<sup>1</sup> Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life For our Time* (New York: Norton, 1988), 361-74; Wilhelm Pauck and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought* (London: Collins, 1977), 41-51.

<sup>2</sup> See Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Gay, *Freud*, 374, 389.

fight for king and fatherland in 1914 evaporated as he endured the grueling and unjust realities of army life at the front: “I saw that the unity of the first weeks was an illusion, that the nation was split into classes, and that the industrial masses considered the Church as an unquestioned ally of the ruling groups.” The four years of his military service were alternately hellish and boring. The armistice agreement was finally signed while he was on a furlough in Berlin, and Tillich witnessed the birth of the Weimar Republic, the hyperinflation crisis, and the Spartacist Uprising of 1919 – with its pitched battles in the streets between workers and right-wing paramilitaries – with a rising horror at the human costs of the nationalism that had pitched Germany and Europe into war in the first place. The safe, sheltered, and happy world of his bourgeois youth was crumbling before his eyes. Despair turned to anger. The meek clergyman’s son was on his way to becoming a social, cultural, and theological radical.<sup>4</sup>

The brutality of the war and the enormity of its social and personal costs also gave both men occasion to brood on the darker tendencies in human nature more generally. Lecturing at the University of Vienna in 1915, Freud encouraged his listeners to “look away from the individual to the great war that is still ravaging Europe,” and to “think of the excess of brutality, cruelty, and mendacity which is now allowed to spread itself over the civilized world.” He asked whether it was possible to hold only “a handful of unscrupulous and ambitious men” responsible for “loosing all these evil spirits” and whether “the millions of the led [were] not

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, eds. C.W. Kegley and R.W. Bertall (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), 12; Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 53-6.



partially guilty, too.” These ruminations ripened into a long essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which Freud first articulated his notorious concept of the “death-instinct,” an inherent drive in all organisms towards destruction, extinction, and release from the tensions and pains that are inherent to life. The essay was completed and published in 1920, shortly after the death of his daughter.<sup>5</sup>

Tillich’s battlefield experiences during the war overwhelmed him with a similar sense of disillusionment. In 1916, he had suffered from two different nervous collapses during the Battle of Verdun. The “experience of the abyss” that communicated itself to him amid the carnage of battle he never forgot. It became what he later called a “personal Kairos,” a moment of opening, awe, horror, and possibility that never left him, although he disliked talking about it.<sup>6</sup> The “nice God” that had presided over his childhood imagination died irrevocably amid “the sound of exploding shells, of weeping at open graves, of the sighs of the sick, of the moaning of the dying.”<sup>7</sup> Today we would certainly say that he had Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. To his father he wrote from the front lines,

I have constantly the most immediate and very strong feeling that I am no longer alive. Therefore I don’t take life seriously. To find someone, to become joyful, to recognize God, all these things are things of life. But life itself is not dependable ground. It isn’t only that *I* might die any day, but rather that everyone dies, *really* dies, you too,—and then the suffering of mankind—I am an utter escatologist—not that I have childish fantasies of the death of the world, but rather that I am experiencing the actual death of this our time. I preach almost exclusively “the end.”

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ([1920] New York: Norton, 1990); Gay, *Freud*, 391-7.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 153.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, “Powers and Principalities,” in *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 50.

When a female friend from home sent him a photograph of herself reclining on a lawn in a white dress, he responded that he found it difficult to believe that such a thing still existed.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Tillich – like Freud – recovered from his wartime despair, and his encounter with the abyss proved to be generative for his entire subsequent life and thought. Tillich’s immediate postwar years were punctuated by further upheavals – including the discovery of his wife’s affair with his best friend, her decision to end their marriage, and his sister Johanna’s sudden death in childbirth – but they were also explosively productive both intellectually and professionally. And it was exactly the recognition that “life itself is not dependable ground” that inspired Tillich to seek a religious expression that went beyond the familiar symbols of church, king, and country. His faith was chastened – and radically so – but not broken. He later wrote that the apostle Paul’s assurance from the letter to the Romans – that “neither death nor life, nor angels or demons, nor things present or things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation” would be able to separate human beings from the love of God – proved to him stronger than the unimaginable death that had surrounded him during the war. For it showed that no thing, no power, no force, however potent, could “destroy the *meaning* of our lives even if they can destroy our lives.”<sup>9</sup> The rebirth of meaning in the depths of meaninglessness, absurdity, and death on a mass scale became a fitting symbol for the radical hope implied in the Christian message, which needed to be distinguished

<sup>8</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 49, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, “Powers and Principalities,” in *The New Being*, 52.

at all costs from the moral teachings and social authority of the Christian churches. Amidst constant conversation with other intellectuals, both religious and secular, Tillich began during the early 1920s to outline the tenets of his “system” – which aimed to reinterpret the classical Christian symbols in terms recognizable to anxious moderns – which he spent the rest of his life elaborating.

The sources for this symbolic and imaginative reconstitution of Christian theology were various. They included Greek ontology going back to the pre-Socratics. They included the German classical philosophical tradition from Kant to Hegel to Schelling, on whom Tillich had written his doctoral thesis. They included the writings of mystics and religious adepts from Augustine to Martin Luther to Jakob Bohme to Tillich’s personal friends Martin Buber and Karl Barth. They included the literature and philosophy of the existentialist movement from Dostoyevsky to Nietzsche to Kafka to Heidegger. And, above all, they included the dynamic psychology of Freud, whose thrusting and often malign-seeming investigations of unconscious motivation were increasingly important to Tillich both intellectually and personally. Freud was undergoing a substantial evolution of its own during this same time, as we have seen, and was also becoming a symbol of wider cultural radicalism in the bohemian and intellectual circles where Tillich found himself living after the war. Psychoanalysis increasingly stood for an entire way of approaching the inner life that was frank, suspicious, and mordantly disillusioned. Tillich and his friends, including Hannah Werner, the young woman artist who would become his wife of over forty years, were immersed in endless conversations about dreams, death, eroticism, art, and the demonic. After the idyll of

his childhood and the suffering and privation of the past six years, Tillich was now in touch with the elemental forces of creativity and sexuality, what he called the “powers of origin.” It was a period, he remembered, of “creative chaos.”<sup>10</sup>

Freud’s psychology was a major inspiration for the modernist cultural ferment of postwar Berlin, which expressed itself in the arts, literature, and philosophy as well as in popular culture and sexual norms. All this material was grist for what Tillich called, in a famous lecture to the Kant Society in Berlin in 1920, a “theology of culture”: a religious analysis of culture which would seek out the theological meaning of cultural expressions, contemporary and historical, on the assumption that all culture is the expression of some kind of religious longing or “ultimate concern.” As Tillich later reflected, Freud’s significance was that he gave a “scientific methodological foundation” to the insights of poets, writers, and philosophers throughout European history who had recognized the vital role of unconscious forces in all human creativity.<sup>11</sup> By naming and classifying the “transpersonal and sub-personal powers” with a “seemingly autonomous existence” that ruled human life, Freud had helped to rediscover the demonic side of human nature and registered a sharp protest against liberal humanism as well as the calculating, objectifying spirit of modern industrial society. Tillich’s 1920 pamphlet “The Demonic” cited “the poetic, metaphysical, and psychoanalytic explorations of soul” for his elaboration of the category of the demonic as the “the relatively

<sup>10</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 79. For the interwar culture of psychoanalysis in Berlin – which was more political, more literary, and more engaged with feminism and homosexuality than in Vienna – see Veronika Fuechtner, *Berlin Psychoanalytic: Psychoanalysis and Culture in Weimar Republic Germany and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *The Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 117.

independent eruption of the ‘abyss’ in things,” as the “unity of form-creating and form-destroying strength” that was visible in expressionist paintings, in existentialist literature, and in psychoanalytic case studies.<sup>12</sup> Against the view that human beings were fully rational and moral agents capable of deciding their own fates, Freud’s project was to show that dark and atavistic, if also partly creative, impulses were at work in everyone and everything; things were not as simple as they seemed on the surface.

But Freud himself was not simple either; equally his project was to tame the unconscious powers on behalf of a scientific and rationalistic self-management, and in this way he could be seen as yet another partisan of consciousness and control. “Where id was, there ego shall there be,” as the famous Freudian dictum went. Tillich’s relationship to the new Freudian temper of the times was therefore ambivalent. This much was true intellectually, as this dissertation will attempt to show at much greater length. But it was also the case personally. Tillich underwent a brief and incomplete analysis himself, probably sometime in 1920, with one of the boarders at his Berlin apartment, a psychoanalyst-in-training named Christian Hermann. That Tillich undertook analysis but did not complete it is metaphorically apt. He was deeply grateful for this exposure, which seems to have left a lasting effect on him: “I was a barbarian when I returned from the war until a friend introduced me to a few psychoanalytic tricks of living,” he later reflected to his biographer Wilhelm Pauck.<sup>13</sup> And yet he prematurely ended his treatment – for

<sup>12</sup> Tillich, “The Demonic,” in *The Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 81, 84, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 56.

reasons that necessarily obscure, even perhaps to him. Maybe he was repressing the memory of his war experiences. Perhaps the death of his mother over a decade earlier.

Not much is known about this abortive enterprise, but what is known is suggestive.<sup>14</sup> During a lecture given later in life, titled “Surface and Depth,” Tillich referred to Freud’s view that it was “possible to elevate all elements of the unconscious into consciousness, and to heal all distortions of the mind by making what is in us conscious.” He then referenced “the opposite feeling,” which for him was represented by Nietzsche, whose writings he had joyfully discovered in the aftermath of his nervous attack at the Battle of Verdun. Tillich expressed an obvious sympathy for the Nietzschean view:

there is a large group of people, philosophers as well as poets, who follow Nietzsche instead of Freud and who protest against a situation in which the unconscious, as he calls it, the “creative chaos,” is lost. He believed that without creative chaos, no star can be born in a human mind, that the creative chaos is at the same time the mother’s womb of all spiritual creation. Here you have the two opposite answers, and there are people, some great poets, who didn’t want to undergo the psychoanalytic process because they were afraid it would deprive them of their creative chaos, of those elements of the unconscious out of which creation – this unheard-of possibility of man – comes.

Tillich, of whom it could be said that he “half-underwent” the psychoanalytic process, seems to have put himself in this category of “philosophers” and “poets,” even as he celebrated psychoanalysis and made its intellectual contributions central

<sup>14</sup> One of the sessions apparently ended when he ran from the room and began trying to strangle his not-yet-wife Hannah, who had been sitting in an adjoining room, before coming to his senses. Clearly there was a great deal of volatility in their relationship specifically as well as in Tillich’s broader relationships with women (another topic that will be taken up in the course of this dissertation). See Rollo May, *Paulus: Reminiscences of a Friendship* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 61.

to his entire intellectual system. He did not wish to forfeit his generative power by exposing his inner depths to full scientific examination. And yet he also plainly appreciated the insight into divine and demonic depths generated by such examinations.

Between the Freudian/rationalistic and the Nietzschean/romantic orientations towards the unconscious, he suggested “leaving the question in this contradictory state.” It was a characteristic move on his part. And yet he considered the choice fully justified: at the end of his lecture on “Surface and Depth,” Tillich suggested that ultimate reality – God – could be located neither in consciousness nor in unconsciousness but rather beyond, perhaps below, the distinction between the two.: “Is the unconscious, we ask now, the real depth of man? Or is it still a preliminary level of depth, still somehow superficial? And my answer here is clear: it cannot be the last level, because it is not an independent reality. . . . there must be something deeper than the alternative of the unconscious and the conscious in man.” That something deeper was the individual person, the center of which “resists both the reduction to the unconscious drives and the transformation into conscious processes.” Here, Tillich thought, “the limit of the understanding of man is reached. The individual person manifests itself, but is not itself the manifestation of something else. But it is the rock-ground of all psychological inquiry. We cannot go below it. And therefore it is at the ground, beyond grasp, it is the limit of all psychological penetration.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tillich, “Man’s Self-Interpretation: Surface and Depth,” *The Self-Understanding of Man in Contemporary Thought Series* (Lowell Lectures, Harvard Divinity School), T577 69, Tillich Audio Collection, William Smith Morton Library, Union Presbyterian Seminary.

Tillich had an entire academic career in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. But suffice it to say that his interest in Freud and psychoanalysis in the immediate post-WWI years represented an early peak in his engagement with the subject, from which he temporarily moved on and to which he would not fully return until the 1940s. As he assumed leadership of a circle of self-styled “religious socialists,” and especially as he confronted the rise of the Nazi Party and the threat to his Jewish academic colleagues during the early 1930s, Tillich’s thought took a more political and Marxist turn – visible in books such as *The Religious Situation* (1925) and *The Socialist Decision* (1933) – that led to his dismissal from the University of Frankfurt as well as his emigration to the United States upon the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Tillich’s early years in America, when his English was still fragmentary and when the attention of his entire milieu was fastened upon the unfolding world crisis, remained in the orbit of what was called in America the “social Gospel” (he still preferred to call it “religious socialism”). Together with his friend and colleague Reinhold Niebuhr, who had helped to secure him his professorship at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he was engaged in a project of remaking liberal Protestant theology in a less optimistic and utopian cast, one that critiqued both liberal capitalism and Marxian socialism while acknowledging the tragic complexities of life, including all moral and political action.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr ([1925] New York: Henry Holt, 1932); Paul Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, trans. Franklin Sherman ([1933] Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).



Still, Tillich had been bitten by the bug of the unconscious back in 1920 and it was thereafter an ever-present element in his theological and philosophical thinking. Even during his more “political” stage he maintained an interest, latent but significant, in Freud. After he emigrated to the United States in 1933, one of his first lectures at Union Theological Seminary was titled “The Spiritual Implications of Psychoanalysis.”<sup>17</sup> Earl Loomis, Tillich’s later colleague at Union and the first director of the Program in Psychiatry and Religion, described Tillich’s rising interest as a slow, irregular germination:

As late as 1933 to 1937 he was groping for the place of psychoanalysis in his philosophical system, and for him it still remained somewhat isolated and peripheral. . . . The effort to assimilate and accommodate himself to psychoanalysis was a difficult one for Tillich, as for many others of his time. Persisting, his curiosity eventually was rewarded and the interchange that grew out his close alliance with analysis and analytic thought was enduring. In time he came to speak and write as one who had seen the problems and the conflicts, one who had experienced the drives and the defenses, one who had struggled with the resistances and the transference. Eventually the familiarity became deep and lasting.

Tillich would end up teaching and writing in the United States for over thirty years: first at Union until 1955, then as a University Professor at Harvard until 1962, and finally at the University of Chicago until his death in 1965. In America, he was forced to learn a new language, to find a new public audience, and to reframe his thought in terms that would appeal to the concerns of a much different intellectual milieu.

In the period coming out of World War II, when the narrative of this dissertation picks up, those terms were increasingly therapeutic, inward, and psychological in ways that showed his growing interest in psychoanalysis to

<sup>17</sup>May, *Paulus*, 34.

advantage. For Tillich, the shift in intellectual climate represented something new and not new at the same time. It was not new in the sense that Tillich's engagement with Freud went back to 1920, amid the cultural chaos and experimentation of the Weimar period. But it was indeed new in the popular resonance it achieved. When an interviewer in 1955 asked him about the shift in the intellectual culture since his arrival to America – “from the political to the psychological” – Tillich harkened back to his earlier experience:

That's a very interesting development which I experienced. When I first came to this country, Europe was full of anxiety, a feeling of meaninglessness – and all this exploded finally in the Hitler revolution, and in Communism, and in the Second World War. When I came to this country, very little of this was noticeable – you simply couldn't find much of it. I, of course, gave in my lectures some of the material I had learned and studied and researched in Europe. But in the first years there was very little reply to all this. They couldn't really find what I was talking about, because they hadn't experienced these things. Now, slowly, this situation changed. In the later thirties, in the Second World War, and especially during the Cold War after the Second World War, something of that anxiety which we had in Europe before became visible also in this country. And I noticed this very much in my lectures and sermons in the colleges and universities. And whenever I spoke, especially in the last five years, about the different forms of anxiety and so on, then there was a tremendous response in all of these younger people, and in many of the older too, but especially in the younger people – so that I finally decided to give some foundation lectures in Yale University, the so-called Terry Lectures, under the heading of what later became my book, *The Courage to Be*. This simply means that I wanted to give an answer to the growing anxiety which developed also in this country. The answer was, “Courage,” but a very special kind of courage which I tried to develop there, not the courage of the soldier, but the courage of the human being, who feels all the riddles and all the meaninglessness of life, and who nevertheless is able to say “yes” to life.

When the interviewer asked Tillich to account for this shift in cultural mood, he cited disappointment that World War I had not made the world safe for democracy, anxiety about the rise of fascism and communism during the later thirties, and finally the experience of the Second World War itself: “Then, the American younger

generation went into the Second World War, and came out of it, and the world looked darker than before. In this East-West split, as I sometimes say, the whole world was schizophrenic, which is a kind of mental disease in individuals, and I had the feeling mankind as a whole has this disease.”<sup>18</sup>

Freud, for his own part, also became an exile from the Nazis after Germany annexed Austria in 1938, although he wound up in England rather than America. After the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud’s thought tended toward sweeping theories of culture and civilization that were built atop his clinical and psychological insights. The “death-instinct” played an increasingly large role in these “meta-psychological” speculations. Freud died, of throat cancer, in 1939. But this date in some ways marked only the beginning of his intellectual apotheosis in the Anglophone intellectual world. For during and after the Second World War, the psychoanalytic mentality made its fullest appearance to date on the American scene and achieved a widespread ubiquity – to the point of pervading basic assumptions and ways of speaking and thinking – both within the medical/psychiatric profession and in the wider culture. The seeds for a view of life that had been planted amid the wreckage of bourgeois Europe, that had been uprooted by the Nazis, and that germinated during the 1930s among a generation of talented émigré intellectuals, of which both Freud and Tillich were prototypical examples, finally began to sprout on American soil after the Second World War. It was during this “inward moment” that Tillich made his American career.

<sup>18</sup> *Frontiers of Faith*, “A Conversation with Dr. Paul Tillich and Mr. Werner Rode, a graduate student of theology,” produced by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., National Broadcasting Company, 1956, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXoH0Rtc7OQ>.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **THE INWARD MOMENT**

This dissertation is an attempt to narrate the life, thought, ministry, and public engagements of a German-born Protestant theologian and philosopher of religion in order to catch a revealing glimpse of a broader current of postwar American intellectual life, one that brought together psychological and religious aspirations in the search – not always successful, and admittedly so – for health, wholeness, self-realization, and depth. Paul Tillich was a unique figure in the American intellectual and religious landscape. He is not “representative” by any measure; as an immigrant, a self-conscious radical in both theology and politics, and a bearer of continental philosophical and theological traditions, he remained throughout his later decades an outsider to several of the most characteristic and mainstream trends occurring on the American intellectual scene – from logical positivism in philosophy to behaviorism in psychology to the New Criticism in literature. But he did effectively encapsulate and articulate the religious longings, depth-psychological interests, and existential disillusionment of a significant swath of American intellectuals – believing and unbelieving. In fact, he did more than this, for his writings also helped to form a space where secular and religious concerns could meet in the first place.

In one sense, the focus of the dissertation is narrow. It explores a central yet by no means exhaustive problem in Tillich’s thought and among his circle: the relationship between theology and psychoanalysis. (Or, viewed somewhat more

expansively, between religion and therapy.) The mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of a substantial movement of collaboration between clergymen and psychotherapists that helped to form the pastoral ideal of a healing ministry and that has been influential in much of subsequent liberal Protestant preaching, teaching, and theology. The theoretical and practical relations between the psychoanalytic movement and what, in the Christian tradition, is called “the cure of souls” was perhaps Tillich’s central theological theme during the period of his American prominence. He was a leader in the rapprochement between liberal clergymen and psychotherapists that took place after before, during, and after World War II, and was himself strongly influenced by Freudian insights about human nature. At the same time, he also offered sharp criticisms of the philosophical presuppositions of psychoanalysis and believed that psychotherapeutic techniques – however valuable in resolving preliminary and neurotic forms of anxiety – could not touch the existential anxiety that lay at the core of the human predicament. This was instead the object of a transcendent, religious “courage to be” achieved by and through paradoxical acts of self-acceptance.

Despite this relatively tight focus, however, the encounter between religion and therapy in Tillich’s thought and milieu is an ideal theme to dramatize his historical significance more generally. For in the period before, during, and after the war, both religion and psychology were, in different ways, fashionable among the thinking classes in the United States – even among those not directly involved with the churches or the psychological helping professions. This was the time when European existentialism made its splashy debut in America; when large numbers of

intellectuals, reeling from the social, political, and economic upheavals of the previous twenty years, underwent analysis, took up Zen meditation, or converted to Roman Catholicism; when terms like “depth,” “paradox,” “tragedy,” and “ambivalence” peppered elite vocabularies; and when Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and Freud became culture heroes of anxiety and alienation. Tillich was simultaneously an exponent and also a product of this “age of anxiety.” Religious belief and psychological insight each had their own specialized adherents, but together they also contributed to a diffuse if nonetheless recognizable mood among the postwar intelligentsia, a mood that I refer to (with hopes of coining a term) as the “inward moment.”<sup>19</sup>

This mood is easy to caricature as sententious, self-involved, or depoliticizing. Insofar as it has been woven into a broader narrative of American intellectual history, the “inward moment” has usually been figured as part of the odyssey of postwar intellectuals, especially of a liberal anticommunist bent: from alienated hedonism and dyspepsia in the 1920s to solidaristic leftism in the 1930s through crisis and agonized reappraisal in the 1940s to Cold War liberalism, nationalism, and alleged conformity in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> “De-radicalization” is the main

<sup>19</sup> The closest attempt by an historian to compass this world is framed around a different concept – “existentialism” – that plays a significant role in my own discussion as well. See George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> The representative career of this transit would be Lionel Trilling. See Michael Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009; Allen Wald, *The New York Intellectuals and their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Mark Grief, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Jackson Lears, “A Matter of

development of this narrative, and an interest in religion or psychology is often regarded as a form of distraction or retreat from the politically engaged and oppositional stance of the Old Left. The existential inwardness of many intellectuals during the postwar era is seen as a “failure of nerve,” a form of therapeutic or aesthetic self-absorption, or a marker of ideological exhaustion and accommodation.<sup>21</sup> Tillich himself sometimes is faulted in this connection. Richard Fox, for example, characterizes Tillich during the 1950s as “the theologian for an age of abundance, ease, and self-satisfaction” and “an authority on coping with the dissatisfactions of modern existence.” While early Tillich, the religious socialist and dissenter from Hitler, is lauded for his moral courage and his theological analyses of capitalism, fascism, and revolutionary socialism, his later interests in depth psychology and modernist art have been viewed as part of the postwar intellectual’s retreat from critical responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

Without denying some elements of truth in this left critique, the present discussion aims to draw out the intellectual richness – and also the political relevance, both historical and contemporary – of this lost world. Tillich recognized that his project of revivifying the classical Christian symbols in the language of psychotherapy only resonated among the people of his time because so many had

Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society,” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 38-57.

<sup>21</sup> Two forums held by *Partisan Review*, in 1941 and 1950, have significantly shaped the way that this episode in American intellectual life has been perceived. See Sidney Hook, “The New Failure of Nerve,” *Partisan Review* 10, no. 1 (January-February 1941) and “Religion and the Intellectuals,” *Partisan Review*.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 258. See, for example, Martin Green’s comments in a review of Wilhelm and Marion Pauck’s 1976 biography of Tillich. After upholding Tillich’s German career, Green writes, “Too bad it all ended in success.” Martin Green, “Paul Tillich,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1976.

seen, in the storms and catastrophes of the twentieth century, the disillusion of their hopes and the shaking of their foundations. "In every country of the world, including our own," he told a graduating class of seminarians in 1955, "there is an awareness of the power of evil which has not existed for centuries." The carnage of two world wars, the displacement of millions of refugees, the slaughter of entire races and peoples, and, most terrifyingly, the prospect of global nuclear annihilation: these events had opened a window onto the precariousness of human life as well as the forces, including forces within men and women themselves, that threatened to engulf it. "In spite of the many who resist this insight," said Tillich, "we know that we are sick, that we are not whole."<sup>23</sup>

Do we, today, possess this insight? Do we resist it? Perhaps the shaking of our own political, moral, and environmental foundations – the kind of shaking that has already begun and that seems likely to continue in the coming years – is the only thing that can truly deliver it to us. Certainly much of American left-liberalism today lacks an awareness of what Tillich called "the demonic": the irrational forces at work within and among human beings. The dreams of scientific mastery, indefinite progress, and the "end of history" that clouded the thinking of nineteenth-century bourgeois society – and that went into partial abeyance in the middle of the twentieth century – have enjoyed a new life among our contemporary elites that has been only but slightly disturbed by the rise of populist nationalism in the past decade. Why have the central insights of psychoanalysis – that we do not control our

<sup>23</sup> Paul Tillich, "Heal the Sick; Cast out the Demons," in *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 60.



actions in the way we imagine, that our apparent good will often conceals reservoirs of hostility, and that our best intentions often thwart themselves – been taken so often for malign perversity? Why has the awareness of death – the death that waits at the end of every life and the death that subsists as an element within life – been taken for morbidity? Why have expressions of the solemnity, impossibility, and sadness of the human situation been taken for portentousness, to be batted away with easy irony? Revisiting the thought-world and assumptions of the postwar era may give us some insight into these questions, if not necessarily answers to them.

As for Tillich himself, he has all too often been relegated to the seemingly dusty and recondite world of theology-for-theology's-sake, while being neglected in the role he considered most important: as a mediator, a translator, a courageous explorer of the realm of vital contact between secular and religious modes of existence. Tillich was truly a minister to the inward intelligentsia, standing on the "boundary line," in his preferred phrase, between various realms: faith and doubt, rationality and the unconscious, academia and bohemia, church theologians and secular intellectuals, Germany and America, the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and – most germane to this dissertation – religion and psychotherapy. Such mediation was only possible through an immense individual power of being and thinking, capable of reconciling intense tensions and contradictions. In his cognitive as well as in his personal life, Tillich always sought the unity of opposites, a unity that he believed was to be located in the dimension of depth, by an existential and mysterious encounter with the ground and source of all surface dualisms.

The breadth of Tillich's interests, the variety of worlds to which he belonged, and the extent of his personal acquaintance make him a useful prism through which to view the particular slice of the postwar intellectual elite with whom he was in conversation. Tillich's friendships and dialogues with other psychoanalytically oriented thinkers ranged far and wide: from the theologian and social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr to the neo-Freudian therapists Erich Fromm and Karen Horney to the Frankfurt School philosophers Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Adorno to the iconoclastic sociologist and critic Philip Rieff. Braiding together biographical, theological, psychological, and historical perspectives, this dissertation uses Tillich's American career – during which time he partially mostly withdrew from active politics and energetically engaged the psychoanalytic currents of his era – as a prism through which to view the “inward moment.” Covering the period from the end of World War II until Tillich's death in 1965, I will situate and, intermittently, attempt to rehabilitate his thought in the light of one of his most important themes during this time: the encounter of religion and psychoanalysis.

A few words of clarification here need to be said about each of these two potentially ambiguous words, religion and psychoanalysis. In each case, Tillich himself made important terminological clarifications that I have largely followed because I find them convincing. First religion: Tillich identified two different concepts of religion. Religion, most fundamentally, is the dimension of depth and ultimate meaning in all the spheres of life; as such, it is both highly elusive and also present in all culture, even secular, “non-religious” culture. One of Tillich's catchphrases in his lecturing was, “Religion is the substance of culture; culture is the

form of religion.” But religion – as most people know it – is also a concrete, social arrangement of institutions, symbols, rituals, devotions, rites, doctrines, and myths that constitutes one sphere of life beside others (as, for example, the scientific, moral, and aesthetic spheres). The proper goal of religion in the second, narrower sense, then, is to transcend itself for the sake of religion in the more universal sense, by “pointing towards” the ultimate ground, depth, and aim of all life. Tillich’s thought explicitly sought out this kind of self-transcendence, or “theonomy” as he called it; for him, one of Christianity’s chief virtues was that it contained in its message the critique of itself as a concrete religion. This was the symbolic meaning of the Cross. But for the historian, the question remains: where did he sit within the landscape of American “religion” in the narrower, more sociological sense of the term?

Tillich was a Christian. He was also a Protestant. He was also a “liberal” Protestant as long as that designation is taken in a relatively capacious sense. Tillich was, as will be seen, a central figure in the mounting critique of theological “liberalism,” defined by an optimistic view of human nature, faith in progress, and expectation of an immanent social utopia. But at the same time, this was an insider’s critique; Tillich’s milieu was one of “liberal” – or, an alternative term, “ecumenical” – Protestants in the identifiable sense that they sat on the liberal side of a liberal/evangelical divide within mainline Protestant denominations inherited from the 1920s, battled supernaturalism and biblical literalism, identified with radical and revolutionary movements for social change, accepted a large part of modern biblical criticism and evolutionary scientific theory, and sought to engage and

borrow from other religious traditions as well as from secular culture. It was this standpoint of openness towards the scientific and philosophical accomplishments of the secular world, indeed, that predisposed liberalism's self-critical theologians, Tillich included, toward a reckoning with Freud's theories of human nature. Liberal Protestantism was a powerful cultural formation during the midcentury decades that sat at the commanding academic and institutional heights of culture and politics and the significance of which has only recently begun to be properly recognized by historians of American religion. When Tillich sought to build bridges to the more secularized parts of the American intelligentsia, it was from the religious perspective of a liberal Protestant theologian; he always considered its main theological citadel, Union Theological Seminary, to be his "home" in America, even after he left to teach elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 248. The study of "ecumenical" Christianity in midcentury America has been dominated in recent years by the work of the historian David Hollinger, whose fluent essays have synthesized a revival of scholarly interest in this culturally influential and underappreciated milieu. Hollinger offers numerous insights into the demographic, political, intellectual, and cultural dynamics of twentieth-century Christianity, which he calls a "cultural project" rather than a religion, and captures the importance of mainline Protestant denominations and individuals in their strategic position, agenda-setting power, and role in underwriting Civil Rights, antiwar, environmental, and other commitments of the 1960s and beyond. The master-narrative of Hollinger's account is one of secularization, part of a longer arc running from the eighteenth century to the present, in which the theologians and intellectuals of the liberal tradition provided a much-needed "halfway house" for religious believers in their march towards scientific secularism, cosmopolitan openness, and "cognitive demystification." Hollinger commends the openness of Protestant liberals towards secular knowledge-claims, criticizing the perspective of what he calls "Christian survivalists" who point to the institutional decline of the mainline churches in the second half of the twentieth century as a sign of their manifest failure; measured on its own terms, the liberal Protestant project of the twentieth century was a success. Even as liberal Protestants lost out in membership and ceded much of the "symbolic capital" of Christianity to the religious right, they participated effectively in many of the post-1960s movements for "inclusion" and against the parochialism of the old Protestant Establishment. This was a noble decision, in Hollinger's view; the political and theological commitments of mainline liberal Protestants in the 1960s cost them in a way that was analogous to the Democratic Party's electorally costly decision to support Civil Rights legislation. All of this is well and good, except that there were other features of midcentury liberal Protestant institutional world the loss of which is worth mourning beyond the openness towards diversity and inclusion that Hollinger claims was essentially transmuted into the emergent post-Protestant liberalism. These include the willingness of many liberal Protestants, Tillich included, to stand "on the boundary" between secular autonomy and religious heteronomy – to resist, in effect, the stark alternative between rearguard dogmatism and post-religious

The second term, psychoanalysis, is similarly fraught with historical and terminological tension. Throughout this dissertation, I have imitated Tillich in using the terms “psychoanalysis,” “psychotherapy,” and “depth psychology,” all more or less interchangeably. This practice was and is intentionally loose, and may strike some readers as objectionable – particularly in the case of “psychoanalysis,” which has been subject to intense professional turf-wars and proprietary claims exercised especially by the orthodox Freudian school of psychoanalysis. In a 1955 talk at the Washington School of Psychiatry, Tillich recounted a conversation with one such Freudian – a female analyst – that had “moved cordially” until the moment he had used the term “psychoanalysts” to describe people like Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, Carl Jung, and Otto Rank. The woman provoked Tillich’s anger by saying, dismissively, “They are dishonest in calling themselves psychoanalysts. They shouldn’t do it. They do it only for purposes of profit.” Tillich commented: “This situation shows that we have to do something about this term. It is not used here as this psychoanalyst used it, but rather in the meaning into which this term has been transformed and enlarged during the last half-century.”<sup>25</sup>

Sigmund Freud was unquestionably a gargantuan figure in the intellectual culture of mid-twentieth-century America (and figures as a recurrent, albeit somewhat lurking presence in these pages); he was the founder of a movement that

secularism to which Hollinger’s implicitly teleological framing is suited. See David Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity” in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18-55 and “Christianity and Its American Fate: Where History Interrogates Secularization Theory,” in Joel Isaac, et al., *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 295.

<sup>25</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 112.

transformed the landscape of mental health and defined the modern temper of the twentieth century. But the pervasiveness of his influence is exactly the reason why his name cannot be yoked too specifically to any one school, including his own: by the midcentury decades, psychoanalysis was a far more capacious phenomenon than what went on in the analytic societies, journals, and training institutes. It was a whole “climate of opinion,” in W.H. Auden’s words, that influenced not only psychiatry and medicine but also philosophy, social theory, literature, art, film, advertising, cultural criticism, education, child-rearing, and, indeed, theology.<sup>26</sup> It implied an awareness of unconscious strivings in the underground of the personality, a generalized suspicion about human motives, and a recognition that sexuality played a larger role in human nature than conventional wisdom allowed. Often likened itself to a religion, it was postwar American culture’s most prestigious – if also contested – way of conceptualizing the self. While Tillich did have relationships with practicing therapists that will be detailed here – and was something of a lay analyst himself – it was in this more capacious sense of the word that he set out to be a mediator between psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> W.H. Auden, “In Memory of Sigmund Freud,” *Selected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1940), 102. The entire passage reads, “if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd, to us he is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion/under whom we conduct our different lives:/Like weather he can only hinder or help.”

<sup>27</sup> While the historical literature on psychoanalysis in the United States has understandably been focused upon practitioners of mental health, a variety of works have registered Freud’s broader cultural resonance. See, for example, Nathan Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lawrence R. Samuel, *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); John Forrester, “‘A Whole Climate of Opinion’: Rewriting the History of Psychoanalysis,” in *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) and *Freud* (London: Routledge, 2005); and the essays in John Burnham, ed. *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). The best window into the cloistered world of orthodox psychoanalysis is Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

Tillich's determination to stand "on the boundary" between religion and therapy – combined with his deep insights into the philosophical, cultural, and religious implications of psychoanalysis – make him an ideal guide to the substantial and fertile territory of overlap between theology and medicine, a realm that remains vitally relevant today and that has only rarely been explored by cultural or intellectual historians in a non-polemical fashion.<sup>28</sup> Tillich was indeed a theologian of "the therapeutic" in that he saw a healing dimension as intrinsic to religion and perceived mental and spiritual wholeness as an essential *telos* of human beings. But he did not see this healing process as a withdraw from social or political life; neither did he advocate the collapse of religion into psychoanalysis. Insofar as he did seek an analogy between religion and medicine, moreover, he was not a modern innovator; as he liked to point out, the word "salvation," after all, originally meant to make "heal and whole." Jesus, not to put too fine a point on it, was the original therapeutic.

The structure of my dissertation reflects the dialectical, dialogical character

<sup>28</sup> American historians and cultural critics have fashioned a formidable and often convincing critique of "therapeutic culture" – in its individualizing, atomizing, and depoliticizing tendencies – one of the unfortunate side-effects of which is the loss of a positive meaning for the therapeutic and a dismissal of genuine, as opposed to spurious, engagements with it. As Hellenistic philosophy knew, healing what is sick, restoring to essential wholeness what is broken, is (or should be) the central task of thought as well as medicine. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). For the canonical critique of American therapeutic culture, see Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1972); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminished Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). For a response to the canonical critique of therapeutic culture, see Timothy Aubry and Trysh Travis, eds., *Rethinking Therapeutic Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

of Tillich's life and thought. The first two chapters are mirror images of each other, the first examining psychotherapy from the perspective of religion, the second religion from the perspective of psychotherapy. The first chapter, "Protestantism, Psychotherapy, and the Cure of Souls," addresses Tillich's time at Union Theological Seminary and his efforts to assimilate psychoanalytic concepts to systematic theology in line with a broader pastoral-psychological trend in liberal Protestantism. Together with other representatives of what historians have dubbed the "Religion and Health" movement, Tillich believed that there were profound implications for Christian theology in the Freudian revolution. He saw the central insights of psychotherapy, together with existentialist philosophy, as a close ally to the Pauline-Augustinian-Lutheran view of human nature: that is, governed by forces beyond the control of the will or the conscious mind. The findings of psychoanalysis presented a stinging rebuke to the liberal-humanist view of the primacy of consciousness and a reminder that seemingly alien forces often rule our lives, in the face of which appeals to "good will" are completely useless. In view of these unconscious, "demonic" elements in the psyche – especially around sex and eroticism – theology needed to recover a non-moralistic conception of sin: not as the transgression of particular laws but rather as the tragic and universal estrangement of human beings from themselves, from one another, and from being generally. The non-judging attitude of the secular analyst, moreover, provided a model for Christian forgiveness and grace – or "acceptance," as Tillich preferred – that had been lost by American Protestantism in its more interdictory and moralistic forms.

The second chapter, "The Meaning of Anxiety," addresses Tillich's



engagements with psychoanalysis at a time when many in the profession were surprisingly open – given Freud’s famous hostility to religion – to religion and ultimate questions. Throughout his American career, Tillich cultivated relationships with a variety of Freudian and post-Freudian thinkers, many of them fellow émigrés: from more orthodox Freudian critics such as Philip Rieff to “neo-Freudian” revisionists like Erich Fromm and Karen Horney to “third force” devotees of human potential like Carl Rogers and Rollo May. By positioning Tillich among his various psychotherapeutic interlocutors, this chapter will explore the divergence between religious and secular forms of depth psychology. Tillich thought that psychoanalysis, while invaluable in many respects, erased the distinction between creaturely “essence” and fallen “existence” and also confused neurotic anxiety with the more ineradicable, or “basic,” anxiety that always accompanies human finitude. Tillich’s 1952 bestseller *The Courage to Be* spelled out these views for a mass audience.

The third chapter, “Love’s Strange Work,” pauses to portray Tillich the person: his sensitive and yearning temperament, his magnetic personal presence, his childlike (and occasionally childish) openness and vulnerability, and his tortured, promiscuous sex life. The theologian’s many liaisons with women – publicly exposed after his death by his wife Hannah’s memoir *From Time to Time* – seriously dimmed his influence in the world of liberal Protestantism and continues to overshadow his reputation. Without attempting to excuse Tillich’s sexual excesses, which were real and which placed a heavy burden of guilt upon him throughout his adult life, I aim to show his friendships, marriage, and affairs in the light of a more balanced and sympathetic picture of his individual psychology.

Tillich's writings on courage, acceptance, love, and personal ethics are all germane to this task, for he subscribed to a philosophy of "participation" – or "doing the truth" – that made his life and work impossible to pry apart.<sup>29</sup> Of particular interest are his thoughts on love and the erotic, subjects with strong psychoanalytic overtones.

My fourth and final chapter, "An *Aggiornamento* for Protestants," takes up Tillich's broadening interests in his later years and examines his public reception, influence, and image in the early 1960s, the time when he achieved his most significant American fame. A speaking tour to Japan in 1960 ignited Tillich's interest in Zen Buddhism; thereafter, he saw his main life's work as mediating between the religious sensibilities of East and West. In this and other ways Tillich anticipated the pluralist, comparativist, and ecumenical approaches of younger theologians and religious scholars in his circle, especially as the Second Vatican Council picked up steam. Liberal Christianity had, by the time of Tillich's death and partly under his influence, assumed a psychological and therapeutic orientation that contributed to a variety of characteristically "sixties" spiritual trends: a "personalist" style of political engagement emphasizing commitment and authenticity on issues from nuclear activism to Civil Rights; "secular theology" and the "Death of God" movements; and a pluralist interest in non-western religions, especially Buddhism. The elder Tillich was a mentor to – and also a selective critic of – these trends, as well as a figure of inspiration and adulation among the reading public. Tillich's extensive correspondence with his readers provides a fascinating and sometimes strange

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Tillich, "Doing the Truth," in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 115-118.

window into his popular reception during his later years. The encounter of religion and psychoanalysis will continue to provide a guiding thread.

A final word here needs to be said about nomenclature with implications larger than nomenclature. Tillich, together with most of his interlocutors, used the term “man” to signify humankind as a whole. This longstanding linguistic practice assumed a particular resonance and frequency among American and European intellectuals in the middle decades of the twentieth century as critics, novelists, and commentators grappled with what they saw as a “crisis of man”: the advent of dehumanizing ideologies like Fascism and Soviet Communism, the brutalization of human relations brought on by two world wars and a global depression, and the seeming triumph of technical or instrumental rationality. “Man” was a category endlessly asserted, questioned, explored, and even eulogized by writers and intellectuals before, during, and after the Second World War – but rarely with an explicit awareness of its gender.<sup>30</sup>

Due in no small part to justified feminist critiques of its ersatz universality, the term “man” today carries the undeniable whiff of sexism. Whenever possible and felicitous, therefore, I have used other terms such as “human” or “human nature.” Yet there are times when such substitutions are not so felicitous and when “man” – even in its obvious inadequacy – simply works better than, say, the milkier and blander “humanity.” The “fallenness of humankind” is not quite the same thing as the “Fall of Man.” To transform Tillich’s “doctrine of man” – a major topic of this dissertation – into his “view of human nature” is to lose verbal piquancy as well as

<sup>30</sup> See Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, 3-26.

historical verisimilitude. Occasionally, then, here and there, I have allowed “man” to stand; not only because it is true to the historical reality of Tillich’s idiom, but also because it preserves the worthwhile sense of ontological grandeur that, for a time after the Second World War, suffused that idiom. The advantage of the term “man,” after all, was not its gender but rather its singleness: its existential, mythic, religious quality. The use of the term itself should not discredit the entire style of thinking in which it found such prevalent use. It is the style of thinking, and only indirectly the man, that I hope this project can revive.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PROTESTANTISM, PSYCHOTHERAPY, AND THE CURE OF SOULS: THEOLOGICAL GLEANINGS FROM DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY

In the early-to-mid decades of the twentieth century, a seemingly unlikely alliance took shape in the United States between influential sections of liberal Protestantism and the psychoanalytic movement. Despite Sigmund Freud's reputation (and self-conception) as a scourge of organized religion, the clergy of America's mainline Protestant churches were in fact among the most receptive audiences and the most active adapters of Freud's writings, both intellectually and institutionally. Liberal religion's reckoning with therapy led to the birth of entire new fields such as pastoral counseling and pastoral psychology. Indeed, the Freudian revolution effected a basic transformation of mainline Protestant theology as well as religious education and ministerial practice during this time: a transformation that continues to define the basic character of contemporary religious liberalism and its cultural offshoots in America, including the world of recovery, twelve-step programs, and self-help.<sup>1</sup> The common basis on which ministers and therapists collaborated was the aim of healing: whether defined bodily, mentally, or spiritually.

<sup>1</sup> The two best general histories of the collaboration between liberal Protestantism and psychotherapy – the first highly critical, the second in a more sympathetic key – are Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: Religion and Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) and Alison Stokes, *Ministry After Freud* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1985). Other works, which extend this story beyond the midcentury, include Stephanie Muravchik, *American Protestantism in the Age of Psychology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011) and Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

This chapter will aim to portray this confluence of liberal religion and modern psychotherapy during the stages of its growth in the interwar decades and in its full flowering after World War II. Tillich, whose reputation as an intellectual was rising and whose public ministry increasingly engaged this theme, will play a starring role. The first section will depict his milieu at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where Tillich first made his academic home in the United States, and will follow the shifts in the intellectual climate there that eclipsed the old emphasis on politics and neo-orthodoxy and that birthed the new concern with psychology, psychotherapy, and mental health. The second section will step back chronologically in order to detail the slow germination of a movement among liberal Protestant clergy to accommodate the insights of psychology and psychotherapy over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, and will show Tillich's place within and relevance to this movement. The third section will examine Tillich's powerful synthesis of Christian theology and psychoanalytic insight in a way that suggests its continuing significance.

### **Tillich and Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary**

In the spring of 1948, the British historian and philosopher Arnold Toynbee was invited to address a banquet at Union Theological Seminary in New York to celebrate the publication of a volume from his ambitious and much-acclaimed masterwork, *A Study of History* (1934-61). Toynbee was widely feted among the New York intelligentsia that year, his sweeping civilizational theories of "challenge and response" resonating with the sense of twilight struggle, moral gravitas, and

historical cataclysm amid the aftermath of World War II and the onset of the Cold War. The atmosphere on this evening, however, was genteel: white linen tablecloths and candlelight beneath the high ceilings of the seminary's Gothic refectory. On hand to celebrate the occasion were Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry Pitney Van Dusen, and Henry Luce, as well as a sizable portion of New York's religious and intellectual elite. Tillich and Niebuhr were Union's two star theologians, at once leading figures and vociferous critics of American liberal Protestantism. Van Dusen, Union's charismatic new president since 1945, was a major player in the global ecumenical movement and an architect of the World Council of Churches. Luce, the chairman of Union's board of directors, was the head of a sprawling media empire that included *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines. The son of Presbyterian missionaries in China, Luce took a strong interest in both world politics and religion; his 1941 article, "The American Century" had proclaimed a messianic vision of American imperial leadership around the globe. In the course of the previous year he had placed both Toynbee and Niebuhr on the cover of *Time* magazine and would do the same for Tillich a decade later. The four men plus Toynbee were all seated together at the "high table" at the end of the refectory hall.<sup>2</sup>

After the meal, Luce rose to introduce Toynbee. The publisher was handsome, dynamic, and well-spoken: a commanding presence before a group. But

<sup>2</sup> The source for this and the following paragraphs is Landon Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990), 205-207. On Toynbee, see William H. McNeill, *Arnold Toynbee: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). On Van Dusen, especially in his dealings with the global ecumenical movement, see Mark Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). On Luce and his publishing empire, see Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

he did not read his audience well on this evening. He began by lavishing praise on Toynbee's project of understanding the rise and fall of civilizations:

Who in history heretofore has understood, much less controlled, the terrible decline, decay, and disappearance of even the mightiest of nations? Now, at last in understanding, we may, *Deo volente*, begin for once to control these processes of history.

A roomful of neo-orthodox theologians — all exquisitely attuned to the ironies and reversals of history — may not have been the best venue for this rumination; a rising sense of discomfort became palpable in the room. Luce, however, was not at all finished. "*But*," he continued, raising his finger high in the air, "there is one thing Toybee does *not* understand about our common human history." By this point, the entire room was riveted upon him with surprise and anxious expectation. "The one thing Toybee does not understand is that the United States of America has *solved* the problem of the breakdown of cultures!"

Langdon Gilkey, the recounter of this scene and later a theologian in his own right, was a graduate student at the time who was waiting tables at the event. He recalled that "the graduate students at the back of the refectory—long made aware by almost everyone of importance at Union of the imminence of divine judgment on the slightest sign of hubris—expected at the least a thunderbolt to cleave the great hall in two." Everyone looked at the two theological eminences, Tillich and Niebuhr, to see what would their reactions would be to this "blasphemy" – "if not against God, at least against the reigning theology at Broadway and One Hundred Twenty-Second Street!" The two men did not disappoint, each going into "what turned out to be a quite characteristic pose." Niebuhr placed his hands over his bald head and bent down staring gloomily at the floor, with his head almost touching his knees. Tillich



put his hands on his knees and tilted his head far back to stare at the ceiling with a combination of composure and disbelief. Gilkey whispered a quip to the other graduate students at the back of the room: "Look—neither one of them is looking at God! Paulus is looking up, and Reinnie is looking down, and for neither one is there any God in *that* direction!" The remainder of what was said that evening, including Toynbee's speech, was quickly forgotten.

Niebuhr and Tillich were a study in contrasts during the time they both taught at Union from the early 1930s to the mid 1950s. Niebuhr: hard-charging, virile, oracular, gloomy, brash. Tillich: yearning, sensual, peaceable, endearing, mystical. Stories of their contrasting ways, like the one from the Toybee banquet, abounded among the students and faculty at Union. When Tillich became seriously ill with an intestinal parasite, he relished lying in bed and doing nothing. "I can lie here hour after hour and just *be*," he enthused to his student Rollo May, who had come by his apartment to visit and offer sympathy.<sup>3</sup> When Niebuhr was immobilized by a major stroke in 1949, he went into a more despairing and self-scrutinizing mood. "I am ashamed that my convalescence proves to be spiritually so hard," he wrote to a friend, "because it reveals a certain lack in me, a reliance upon jobs and pressures rather than on inner calm."<sup>4</sup> The two men were friends, and used to take long walks together along Riverside Drive. Tillich was forever grateful to Niebuhr for the American's role in rescuing him from Nazi Germany and in getting him hired at Union. Niebuhr, for his part, recognized Tillich as a genius. Tillich tended to be

<sup>3</sup> May, *Paulus*, 34.

<sup>4</sup> June Bingham, *Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 319.

wryly amused, rather than offended, by Niebuhr's "American" bluntness and provincialism; Niebuhr was sufficiently overawed by Tillich's philosophical erudition and won over by his personal charm to overlook what he saw as his impracticality and aestheticism. Tillich once attempted to interest Niebuhr in the flowers growing in the seminary courtyard. Niebuhr had no time for such fripperies: "they were there last year, too," he said as he rushed off.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1930s and early 1940s, when Tillich was recently arrived from Germany and his English was still faltering, Niebuhr was the more dominant presence among the faculty and students at Union. He was a constant whirling dervish of activity, firing off lectures, reviews, speeches, and articles on current intellectual trends or the latest developments in the world crisis. During his lectures he would keep a packed suitcase next to the podium in order to dash off to his next engagement.<sup>6</sup> Tillich's style was initially more halting and reserved, much closer to the model of the unapproachable German "Herr professor." During one lecture not long after his arrival, he was bewildered and humiliated when the hall erupted into laughter at his saying "tame and spice" instead of "space and time"; he blushing corrected himself with "spice and tame," to further laughter. In time he came to appreciate the informality of his students and the give-and-take of discussion following his lectures.<sup>7</sup> He developed a small but devoted following that

<sup>5</sup> Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Life*, 257. On the contrast between Niebuhr and Tillich at Union, see, Ronald Stone, *Politics and Faith: Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich at Union Seminary in New York* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2012); Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 516-521; and Marion Pauck, "Review of Ronald Stone's Book: Politics and Faith," *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2015), 12-15.

<sup>6</sup> Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, viii.

<sup>7</sup> May, *Paulus*, 5-6.

was won over by his personal warmth and intrigued, if also sometimes confused, by his ideas.<sup>8</sup> Henry Sloan Coffin, Union's president until Van Dusen took over in 1945, liked Tillich personally but also did not know quite what to make of him, suspecting that his ideas were too Greek, and possibly unchristian. Tillich participated in the close-knit life of the seminary – chapel services, faculty meetings, refectory meals – with some ambivalence, appreciating the sense of fellowship but fearing that he was being watched constantly by Puritan moralists and obviously preferring the company of his non-church intellectual, artist, and émigré friends. As Tillich later remembered, “It was a shock to an antibourgeois socialist to be rescued by a bourgeois, by *the* bourgeois, nation!”<sup>9</sup>

For all of their temperamental differences, however, Tillich and Niebuhr were essentially united in their overall orientations in the period leading up to World War II. As Niebuhr characterized his own position in 1933, the year after he shocked his Social Gospel colleagues with the publication of *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), he was “theologically to the right and politically to the left of modern liberal Protestantism”; he added that if this stance made him seem unduly cynical and pessimistic then this judgment was “due to the fact that the American mind is still pretty deeply immersed in the sentimentalities of a dying culture.”<sup>10</sup> Politically, the two men were both non-Communist socialists who castigated capitalist exploitation of workers but who sought to mitigate the self-righteousness of the

<sup>8</sup> The theologian Walter Marshall Horton described the tenor of most early American reactions to Tillich as one of “respectful mystification.” It was hours after first listening to Tillich, Horton recalled, “that I realized that the word ‘waykwoom,’ many times repeated, and the key to the whole lecture, was meant to represent the English word ‘vacuum.’” See “To Be Or Not To Be,” *Time* 73, no. 11 (March 16, 1959), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 159-77; Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 205.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 451.

proletarian movement and whose revolutionary fervor softened somewhat towards the end of the 1930s. Both were critical of liberal squeamishness around power politics as well as of the illiberalism of the Soviet Union. Both participated in the global ecumenical conferences of the 1930s in an attempt to head off the mounting social and political crisis. Both grew more hawkish and critical of the liberal Protestant churches' pacifism in the face of Hitler's military aggression.<sup>11</sup>

Of the two, Niebuhr was by far the more politically active, serving on dozens of committees and running twice for congress on Norman Thomas's socialist ticket; Tillich frequently relied upon him – also his friends Wilhelm Pauck and James Luther Adams – for advice about which causes to support, which petitions to sign, and which organizations to join.<sup>12</sup> But Tillich was also involved in politics in his own right, dashing off articles for Kenneth Leslie's journal *The Protestant*, serving as chairman of Self-Help for Refugees, a resettlement organization for emigre intellectuals, and helping to organize Americans for a Democratic Germany, a group of anti-Nazi German emigres lobbying for a non-punitive postwar settlement. During the war, unbeknownst to even his closest friends, he also wrote over one hundred German-language radio addresses that were recorded by the Voice of America and broadcast into enemy territory by the Office of War Information. These sermons were high-quality Allied propaganda: predicting Germany's military defeat, urging patriotic Germans to join anti-Nazi resistance movements, and calling

<sup>11</sup> On Tillich and Niebuhr's political development in the 1930s, see Stone, *Politics and Faith*, 55-132, and Donald Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 203-291.

<sup>12</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 178-80, 200; Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 142-192.

attention to the persecution and extermination of European Jewry at a time when the issue was rarely discussed even in America.<sup>13</sup>

Theologically, too, Tillich and Niebuhr occupied a similar position in the period before and during the war; both were busy elaborating a wide-ranging critique of American theological liberalism while earning their bread from the liberal religious institution par excellence, Union Theological Seminary, and operating broadly within the liberal theological tradition. Their uncomfortable reactions to the hubris of Luce's hubristic speech – amid the sumptuous surroundings of the seminary refectory – is a marker of this irony. Liberal theology in the period before Tillich and Niebuhr was, as the historian Gary Dorien writes, a "field-dominating movement" with UTS as its center. Under the guidance of figures such as William Adams Brown and William Newton Clark, the moderate evangelical liberalism that presided at Union in the early twentieth century was borrowed from German sources and pervaded by an aura of optimistic evolutionism, social betterment, genteel graciousness, and moral self-confidence. By the time Tillich and Niebuhr taught there, this tradition was represented – albeit in a somewhat more subdued way – by Union's president, Henry Sloane Coffin, who allowed Tillich a tenured position only after overcoming strong reservations. Coffin retired, and was replaced by van Deusen in 1945. Union theologians as a rule considered themselves thoroughly modern; the Gilded Age battles over evolutionary science and biblical

<sup>13</sup> See Paul Tillich, *Against the Third Reich: Paul Tillich's Wartime Addresses to Nazi Germany* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Tillich stayed abreast of the Holocaust through his network of émigré friends, many of them Jewish, and his association with Dwight MacDonald's journal *politics*, which uniquely covered the topic during the war years. See Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight MacDonald and the politics Circle: The Challenge of Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 41-84.

literalism had already been decided, nineteenth-century Protestant theological orthodoxy had been overthrown, and the task at hand was to realize the Kingdom of God in the social realm while bringing Christianity into alignment with the “best of modern knowledge.”<sup>14</sup>

In this respect, Tillich and Niebuhr were thoroughgoing liberals; they never sought – as the Barthians sometimes did – to question the validity of scientific findings about the natural world or to challenge the historical situatedness of early Christianity. As Tillich recounted, liberal theology “accepted the historico-critical method of secular historical scholarship” and in this respect at least he and his friends followed “the liberal theology, whose scholarly superiority could not be contested.”<sup>15</sup> However, he and they did question the moralistic temper of liberal theology, its self-confident claims to social benevolence, its utopian aspirations, and the absolute distinction it drew between fact and value. This last feature, which Union’s liberals got from the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl, was especially important; the fact-value distinction permitted theology a secure place as the custodian of “values” that originated from biblical or traditional sources endogenous to the Christian community.<sup>16</sup> As Tillich later recounted, the Ritschlian theology, popular both during the years of his own theological formation and later among his colleagues at Union, was

a typical “escape”-theology. It attempts to find in the moral personality a secure stronghold against the naturalism that is triumphant everywhere else.

<sup>14</sup> Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 1-10.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tillich to Thomas Mann, May 23, 1943, Paul Tillich Papers, bMS 649/164, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

<sup>16</sup> For a succinct summary of “American Ritschlianism,” especially in the thought of Union theologian William Adams Brown, see Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 24-31, 42-50.

It does not dare to attack this naturalism. The latter is presupposed; but it is thought that at one point it does not apply, namely in the sphere of values – Rischl's school has developed further in the closest connection with the philosophy of value. The joy over finding an apparently safe island obscured the fact that in this way all of reality, nature and history, were abandoned to the mechanistic bourgeois world-view. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, etc. proved that it was only a pseudo-security. As a student at Halle I, in contrast, demanded a "theology of attack" rather than of defense; and that means metaphysics, of course, especially interpretation of history.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to this project is noteworthy. By unmasking "values" as themselves being historically conditioned – and thus subject to all manner of subterranean influences – these three pillars of modern thought had forced Protestant theology towards a reckoning with the unconscious and into a position of critique towards both religious as well as secular theories of personality.

Various called "Christian realism," "dialectical theology," "neo-orthodoxy," or (provocatively, by Gary Dorrien) "neo-liberalism," the newly ascendant theological sensibility being developed by Niebuhr and Tillich during the 1930s and 1940s was a prophetic judgment aimed generally against human hubris but particularly against liberal optimism and progress. Tillich recounted that when he first arrived in America, if he told a student "that there is a great problem of the concept of God or of The Christ or of the Church, then he was not too deeply moved." But, "if I said to him that there is a great problem about the concept of progress—not technical progress (that, of course, I admit unrestrictedly), but of progress, let's say, in the moral and religious tending of men. Then they said to me: 'You take my faith from me.'" <sup>18</sup> As Gilkey remembered, thinking of his own time at Union

<sup>17</sup> Paul Tillich to Thomas Mann, May 23, 1943, PTP, bMS 649/164.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Tillich, "Psychoanalysis and Christianity," lecture given at the Washington School of Psychiatry, November 6, 1955, PTP, bMS 649 49 (19), 5.

immediately after World War II, Niebuhr and Tillich represented “divergent versions” of the same exciting new theological sensibility, “in marked and contrast to the ‘liberal,’ optimistic religiosity of my own youth.” The new emphasis was upon

a deep sense of the alienation of ordinary historical existence, which made intelligible the war that had just engulfed us; a dependence on special manifestations of renewal and of grace, which fitted our own experience of rescue from meaninglessness; and a central experience of transcendence as the resource of new life, of obligation, and of hope.<sup>19</sup>

Niebuhr and Tillich were both influenced by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who in his *Epistle to the Romans* (1919) had accused the liberal theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – what Barth called “Culture-Protestantism” – of idolatrously confusing bourgeois ethics, social improvement, and nationalistic feeling with divine revelation. Instead, Barth asserted what Kierkegaard had called the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and man, between history and eternity, between human endeavor and divine Word. Barth’s God is “wholly other,” a silent, unknowable principle that stands above, and against, the vicissitudes of all human activity; the only available form of mediation between these two incommensurable realms was the person of Christ. Divine Grace, when it comes, transforms human lives into a permanent crisis, forcing men and women to live thereafter in paradox and struggle with their own sinful natures.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 201-2.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). This emphasis upon the absolute sovereignty of God, as Tillich often conceded, was what partly enabled Barth to steel sections of German Protestantism against the blandishments of National Socialism and to form the theological basis of the so-called “confessing church” that resisted Nazi state ideology. As he told Langdon Gilkey, “‘Venn you’re fighting against a tyrant, zen Barth is ze best man to have on your side. He drives a sharp wedge between heaven and earth, between the gospel and culture. And zat is good venn culture becomes demonic and claims ze authority and power of heaven. With Barth’s sharp *diastasis* (separation), he gives to us ze power to resist ze tyrant who then represents *Kultur*, has in fact swallowed *Kultur* whole, and there is zen *in Kultur itself* no place to stand. Zat is why Barth’s theology had such power in these days. It gave power to all those who wanted to resist Hitler and found in German culture no



Yet if Tillich and Niebuhr both emulated Barth's prophetic, quasi-apocalyptic tone and agreed with him that God transcended or relativized all human hopes and aspirations, neither one was willing to concede that God was "wholly other" to human concerns. In their theories of human history and culture, they were attempting to steer a middle course between the liberal, immanentist "Christ in culture" and the Barthian, supernaturalist "Christ above culture."<sup>21</sup> The God of dialectic theology, at least in the American form of it being supplied by Tillich and Niebuhr, was infinitely beyond culture, to be sure, but also immediately present within culture – if always in an ambiguous way. For Niebuhr and Tillich, Barth was a paradoxical thinker but not, in fact, a dialectical one at all; to place God entirely apart from the here and now of history was to make Him an unknowable stranger, an alien and tyrannical judge on the model of totalitarian dictators. But God, as the Source and Ground of being, was always present in human affairs, and indeed was closer to people than they were to themselves. It would not even be possible for humans to ask the question of God if there were no point of contact between humans and God. For Barth, that contact was contained exclusively in the Christ-

place from which to resist. Barth's message was appropriate for *that Kairos*—more appropriate *than mine*. I respect and have always respected Barth, not only for the originality and power of his theology but also for the clarity of his insight into the idolatry of Hitler and his courage for declaring it.' Tillich paused, and then began in an even firmer voice: 'But' and here Tillich was silent once more and looked at each of us with weighty seriousness and yet also with great vulnerability, as from one who had been vastly misunderstood and had suffered therefrom. He spoke with deliberate emphasis, pausing with great care at each point: 'But, I was *right* about the relation of culture to theology, even a theology of resistance against culture, and Barth was wrong, even about his own "revelation theology" which is *full* of culture. And I resisted for the right reason, justice for the Jews rather than the freedom of their *evangelische* pulpit. And I left on an earlier train!'" Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 204-5. For two contrasting historical assessments of Barth's place in modern religious thought, see Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000) and Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 251-295.

<sup>21</sup> The distinction comes from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

event described in the New Testament. For Tillich and Niebuhr, it was a continuous revelation, a give and take of human questions and divine answers. Tillich compared Barth's idea of divine revelation to "a stone dropped from heaven." Niebuhr, quoting Tillich, complained that "between God and man," in Barth's vision, "there is a hollow space which man is unable of himself to penetrate."<sup>22</sup>

If Tillich and Niebuhr faulted the theological liberals for identifying God with the historical process and for anticipating the realization of a social utopia within history, their complaint with Barthian neoorthodoxy was that it assigned no meaning to history at all. In an address to the Oxford Conference on Life and Work in 1937 – a watershed event in the global ecumenical movement at which both men were present – Tillich attempted to mark out this middle path. The meaning of history, he said, could be found neither "in a final stage of historical development – the ultimate fulfillment of all historical potentialities" – which was the optimistic liberal or Social Gospel view – "nor in an infinite approximation to a fulfillment which can never be reached," as the more sophisticated variants of the liberal position had it. Nor could it be found, as civilizational pessimists like Toynbee or Oswald Spengler contended, in "a continuous change of historical growth and decay as found in nature." Nor, neither, in "a transcendent supra-nature unconnected with history," as the Barthians claimed. The ultimate meaning of history, Tillich stated, "is the supra historical unification and purification of all elements of preliminary meaning which have become embodied in historical activities and institutions."

<sup>22</sup> Paul Tillich, "What Is Wrong with the 'Dialectic' Theology," in *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, ed. Mark Klein Taylor (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991); Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 165.

Tillich added that by “unification,” he meant that “the dispersed embodiments of meaning in historical activities and institutions have an invisible, suprahistorical unity, that they belong to an ultimate meaning of which they are radiations.”

“Purification,” meanwhile, “means that the ambiguous embodiment of meaning in historical realities, social and personal, is related to an ultimate meaning in which the ambiguity, the mixture of meaning and distortion of meaning, is overcome by an unambiguous, pure embodiment of meaning.” The meaning of history could thus be found both within and also beyond itself – in the trans-temporal unity of time in its various, disrupted moments.<sup>23</sup>

Another area in which Niebuhr and Tillich navigated between orthodoxy and liberalism was their treatment of myth – in particular the biblical myths of Creation and Fall. Niebuhr was increasingly influenced on this question by Tillich, who considered the mythical to be an inescapable aspect of all religion. Myths were narrative, non-literal but nevertheless “true” accounts of the human condition, expressing realities belonging to a level deeper than the literal. This understanding of myth was obviously hostile to the kind of biblicist fundamentalism that regarded the Genesis story as an actual, historical event that occurred several odd thousands of years ago. But it also implied a critique of theological liberals, such as the University of Chicago's Shailer Matthews, who saw in the story of Adam and Eve nothing more than an expression of primitive or abject fears of a higher power that needed to be discarded if Christian civilization was to advance. Myths, as Niebuhr

<sup>23</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Kingdom of God and History,” in *Theology of Peace*, ed. Ronald H. Stone (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 31-33.

wrote in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1936), were powerful things: they disclosed timeless truths about the human condition and man's relationship to the larger order of being; they thus pointed towards an existential reality deeper than what could be described by a merely scientific, "horizontal" account of the finite relations between matter. Modern Christianity had erred when, under the pressure of the sciences, it had succumbed to the temptation either to literalize its myths (in the fundamentalist fashion) or to discard them altogether (the liberal solution).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 11-14; Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 55-62. See Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 455-6 and *The Word as True Myth: Interpreting Modern Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997). Although they agreed substantially on this topic, there were subtleties of interpretation that the two men enjoyed debating. Langdon Gilkey relates an anecdote giving some flavor of these disagreements: "It was some meeting at Union, again sometime in 1947-49, where methods in theology were under discussion. Reinnie had been chiding Tillich for deserting a 'mythical' account of Creation and Fall, which kept Creation and Fall clearly separate, and for embracing a philosophical interpretation ('the impersonal and necessitating abstractions of ontology'), which inevitably 'identified' Creation and Fall, the ultimate and baleful evidence of a philosophical pantheism.... Tillich smiled, recognizing a familiar argument in their continuing debate, and then stood up. Pushing back the sleeve of his suit jacket, Tillich looked carefully at his watch and then up at Reinnie. 'Alright, Reinnie. You wish to separate Creation and Fall. Good. Zen how long was it, Reinnie?' Tillich pointed to the face of his watch: 'Was it from twelve noon to five after twelve, Reinnie, or perhaps a little longer? How long did ze good Creation, separate from ze Fall, last? And, Reinnie, if you do not, in fact cannot, say to me how long it lasted, then how can we *separate* zem as you wish to do? And what does it *mean* to try to separate zem in myth if zey cannot be separated? Must we not hold zem together as one event, even if we distinguish zem as different aspects of that event of coming to be? But that is ontology united to myth, is it not Reinnie?' Niebuhr may not have understood how Tillich escaped pantheism, but he certainly understood when someone had gotten the better of him! Thus he laughed that delighted if somewhat embarrassed laugh that appeared naturally whenever he realized the joke was on him, shrugged his shoulders, and muttered something about the obscure labyrinths of philosophy." Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 203. In his later writings, such as *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* and *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich acknowledged the inescapable tension between myth and the philosophical critique of myth. He writes: "Myths are always present in every act of faith, because the language of faith is the symbol. They are also attacked, criticized and transcended in each of the great religions of mankind. The reason for this criticism is the very nature of the myth. It uses material from our ordinary experience. It puts the stories of the gods into the framework of time and space although it belongs to the nature of the ultimate to be beyond time and space. Above all, it divides the divine into several figures, removing ultimacy from each of them without removing their claim to ultimacy. This inescapably leads to conflicts of ultimate claims, able to destroy life, society and consciousness. The criticism of the myth first rejects the division of the divine and goes beyond it to one God, although in different ways according to the different types of religion. Even one God is an object of mythological language, and if spoken about is drawn into the framework of time and space. Even He loses his ultimacy if made to be the content of concrete concern. Consequently, the criticism of the myth does not end with the rejection of the polytheistic mythology." *Dynamics of Faith*, 56-7.

The myth of Creation demonstrates the goodness of man's being *as being*, in its state of pure essence or potentiality: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." The myth of the Fall of Man, meanwhile, shows the state of alienation or estrangement from this essential goodness in which man existentially lives – a state that is tragically unavoidable but for which he paradoxically also bears a personal responsibility. Here was a refurbishment of the doctrine of original sin, not as a moral stain inherited from an historical Adam but rather as a description of the human condition.<sup>25</sup> The story of Adam and Eve in the garden represented the gap between divine potential and human reality. It was a narrative representation of the fall, inherent to the basic ontological structure of reality, "from essence to existence."

The portrait of human nature that emerged from books such as Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (which he originally gave as the Gifford Lectures in 1942) and Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (which he worked on throughout his academic career) was one in which human greatness and hubris were ambiguously intermixed. The result was a sharp irony: man's self-transcending capacities give him the unique awareness of his own finitude and

<sup>25</sup> Tillich and Niebuhr, however, both had strong reservations about the term "original sin" because of the implication that evil was prior to good in human beings, and by the 1960s the two men had jointly decided to refrain from using it. In a response to a reader who asked Tillich to explain why, in his theology, "is evil innate and good not?" he rejected the premise: "Actually there is no theologian who would make the statement you imply in your question. The theological answer is, that the good is innate and that the bad is a distortion of the good, and nothing independent. Because of the many misinterpretations of the doctrine of 'original sin', Niebuhr and I have decided that we shall not use the term at all. Man is, this is my doctrine, essentially good. But under the conditions of existence in time and space he distorts his essential goodness; and this is a universal tragic destiny to which everybody is subjected. It is the destiny of estrangement from his true being." Paul Tillich to Donna Petrie, June 25, 1965, PTP, bMS 649/174.

limitation in contrast to the divine.<sup>26</sup> But this very awareness also tempts him to transcend his limits in the attempt to become like God. Evil, as Augustine had claimed, is always and everywhere a finite good that pridefully lays claim the status of an infinite good. It was the prophetic task of modern theology, as Niebuhr and Tillich saw it, to cut down such claims and to cultivate a general awareness of the ambiguous nature of all human creativity.

The place of psychoanalysis in this project was itself ambiguous. Both Niebuhr and Tillich considered Freud's attack on the sentimentalities and harmonistic illusions of bourgeois culture to be parallel to their own efforts in theology. Tillich's debts to Freud reached back to very early in his career as a theologian, as we have seen, and would receive their most mature expression during the 1950s, as we will see later in this chapter. Niebuhr found depth psychology to be "illuminating" insofar as it demonstrated how "the inner organization of the self is much more intricate than was supposed." But both he and Tillich also resisted Freud's thoroughgoing pessimism and harbored strong doubts about his basic picture of human nature. Niebuhr, in particular, was inclined to write and speak dismissively of Freud. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, he classified psychoanalysis as a species of "romanticism" that viewed "human vitalities in purely biological terms." By envisioning the id as "a chaos, a seething cauldron of excitement" and the super-ego as a purely external imposition of societal norms, Freud allegedly denied the spiritual complexity both of vital impulses and of social discipline, reducing

<sup>26</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941); Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951-1963).

selfhood to a mechanistic interaction between the two. Worse, his pessimism about civilization in general was finally “a way of deflecting insights into the pretensions of a particular historical form and discipline so that the individual who is still attached to it socially and benefits from its privileges, need not undergo the pain of seeking socio-moral alternatives.” In this sense, Freud’s “pessimistic conclusions reveal the basic spiritual problem of the upper middle classes as clearly as Marxism reveals that of the proletarian classes and fascism that of the lower middle classes.”<sup>27</sup>

From Niebuhr's perspective, Tillich was in some danger himself of falling into this kind of mandarin pessimism in the period coming out of World War II. Tillich had indeed shifted his emphasis away from Marx and towards Freud, away from politics and towards culture, away from vigorous political action and towards inward reflection. Unlike Niebuhr, who at the war's end threw himself with characteristic manic energy into the liberal anti-communism of Americans for Democratic Action, Tillich greeted the outcome of the war – the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the discovery of the German death camps, and the incipient hostilities between America and the Soviet Union – with a sense of deep foreboding, “the end.” In the title sermon from his collection, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (1948), he connected the explosion of the first atomic bombs with the fiery prophecy of Second Peter, that “the heavens will vanish with a crackling roar, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burnt up.” Tillich commented: “This is no longer vision; it has become physics. We know that in the ground of our earth, and in the ground of everything in

<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 42, 52-3.

our world that has form and structure, destructive forces are bound."<sup>28</sup> He foresaw the coming period as a "sacred Void" to be endured and waited out in patient expectation of another era; the *kairos* that Tillich had envisioned after the First World War had closed.<sup>29</sup> During the interwar period, Tillich had been haunted by a recurring dream: an apocalyptic vision of sheep grazing on the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. In 1945, a New York newspaper ran a photograph depicting exactly such a scene. Tillich wrote to a friend: "How literally my prophecy of the 'sheep' has been fulfilled!"<sup>30</sup>

The fate of Germany loomed large in Tillich's sense of diminished political hope. His withdrawal from active politics was directly precipitated by his bruising

<sup>28</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Shaking of the Foundations," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Tillich, "In the Sacred Void: Being and God," in *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, 124-5. In this remarkable essay, Tillich reflected on the meaning of the atom bomb and the Cold War and related it to his experience after World War I. "A new element has come into the picture, the experience of the 'end'. Something of it appeared after the First World War, but we did not feel it in its horrible depth and its incredible thoroughness. We looked at the beginning of the new more than at the end of the old. We did not realize the price that mankind has to pay for the coming of a new theonomy; we still believed in transitions without catastrophes. We did not see the possibility of final catastrophes as the true prophets, the prophets of doom, announced them. Therefore, our theonomous interpretation of history had a slight tinge of romanticism, though it tried to avoid any kind of utopianism. This has come to an end because the end itself has appeared like a flash of lightening before our eyes; and not only among the ruins of central and eastern Europe but also within the abundance of this country has it been seen. . . . A present theology of culture is, above all, a theology of the end of culture, not in general terms but in a concrete analysis of the inner void of most of our cultural expressions. Little is left in our present civilization which does not indicate to a sensitive mind the presence of this vacuum, this lack of ultimacy and substantial power in language and education, in politics and philosophy, in the development of personalities, and in the life of communities. Who of us has never been shocked by this void when he has used traditional or untraditional secular or religious language to make himself understandable and has not succeeded and has then made a vow of silence to himself, only to break it a few hours later? This is symbolic of our whole civilization. Often one gets the impression that only those cultural creations have greatness in which the experience of the void is expressed; for it can be expressed powerfully only on the basis of a foundation which is deeper than culture, which is ultimate concern, even if it accepts the void, even in respect to religious culture. Where this happens, the vacuum of disintegration can become a vacuum out of which creation is possible, a 'sacred void', so to speak, which brings a quality of waiting, of 'not yet', of being broken from above, into all our cultural creativity. It is not an empty criticism, however radical and justified such criticism may be. It is not an indulgence in paradoxes that prevents the coming-down to concreteness. It is not cynical detachment, with its ultimate spiritual dishonesty. It is simple cultural work out of, and qualified by, the experience of the sacred void."

<sup>30</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 208.



experience as chairman of the Association for a Democratic Germany, a group of anti-Nazi German emigres formed in 1944 who looked forward to the postwar de-Nazification of German society and who sought to forestall punitive proposals for the “depastoralization” of Germany like those proposed by Roosevelt's Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. The group was split by the question of Communist participation, and mistakenly identified as both pro-Nazi and pro-Communist by the U. S. Army, which blacklisted Tillich in 1945 (the status was later revoked). The group's activities culminated in a disastrous meeting with the president, arranged by Tillich's friend Eleanor Roosevelt, in which Tillich gave a prepared speech on the reconstruction of Germany under democratic auspices and FDR lectured his horrified emigre guests on Germany's need to do as the allies instructed or else suffer continued bombardment.<sup>31</sup> The Association fell apart after the Potsdam Conference as it became clear that Germany would be divided by the geopolitical and ideological rivalries that defined the postwar order. As Tillich wrote to the theologian Edgar Sheffield Brightman in 1948, “After Potsdam the Committee was split for the same reasons for which the Great Alliance has broken. ... There is no more Germany, but an American and a Russian colony, and this can be changed only by another war which to avoid was the purpose of my Committee. I have resigned from all politics in order to be able to write my *Systematic Theology*.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 201-5. Roosevelt, apparently sensing that he had offended his guests, reassured the intellectuals that postwar Germany would need textbooks, which he urged them to write. Henry Wallace's comic and bumbling attempts to understand Tillich's concept of “the demonic” provided the evening's only respite.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Tillich to Edward Sheffield Brightman, January 9, 1948, PTP, bMS 649/126.

By the immediate postwar era, around the time when they shared the stage with Luce and Toynbee, the intellectual and stylistic differences between Tillich and Niebuhr were beginning to come more sharply into view. "Paulus is looking up, and Reinnie is looking down, and for neither one is there any God in *that* direction!" Gilkey clarified his meaning: "It is well known that Niebuhr's 'biblical God' is 'up there,' in the heavens over us, while Tillich's God, as the source and ground of our being, is 'under' us."<sup>33</sup> Gilkey's distinction may be too neat – both thinkers probably would have taken some exception to it – but it expresses a real clash in sensibilities. For Niebuhr, God is the supreme judge and ironist, laying low the pretensions of human ambition and activity. For Tillich, ultimate reality was to be discovered "in the depth," as another one of his sermons from *The Shaking of the Foundations* put it: "eternal joy is not to be reached by living on the surface. It is rather attained by penetrating the deep things of ourselves, of our world, and of God. The moment in which we reach the last depth of our lives is the moment in which we can experience the joy that has eternity within it, the hope that cannot be destroyed, and the truth on which life and death are built. For in the depth is truth; and in the depth is hope; and in the depth is joy."<sup>34</sup> Tillich was beginning to find in depth psychology a language to express this dependence upon "the deep things."<sup>35</sup>

Their personal friendship, too, began to cool by the mid-1950s. Some of this was due to Tillich's personal behavior – he reportedly made a sexual pass at one of

<sup>33</sup> Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 207.

<sup>34</sup> Tillich, "The Depth of Existence," in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> See, especially, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Scribner's, 1955), a book which obliquely takes aim at what Niebuhr saw as Tillich's psychologizing and ontologizing of the biblical kyrgma. Tillich is obviously the "ontologist" in Niebuhr's book.

Niebuhr's female graduate students not long before he left Union for Harvard – but it was probably also compounded by Niebuhr's resentment at Tillich's rising fame and a sense that Tillich's classical equipoise and aesthetic interests fit into the complacent, bourgeois mood of the mid-fifties all too comfortably. During a television interview in 1956, Tillich praised Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica*, which depicted the brutal destruction of a Spanish village by the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War, as an exemplar of a truly Protestant art, "because there you see the world in pieces." Niebuhr erupted in print that there was nothing at all Protestant about a worldview "at sixes and sevens." Tillich peaceably replied that theology should welcome modern art rather than fearing it.<sup>36</sup> When, late in his life, Tillich published a provocative book of essays on ethics with the Nietzschean title *Morality and Beyond* (1963), he dedicated the book to Niebuhr in honor of "the tension between the ethical, which he has represented, and the ontological, for which I have stood."<sup>37</sup> Niebuhr, however, was appalled: "Doing that was a scandal,"

<sup>36</sup> Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 258. In an essay the following year, on "Protestantism and Artistic Style," Tillich clarified what he meant by calling Picasso's painting "Protestant." What Tillich called "the Protestant principle" – which was not identical with the teaching and preaching of the Protestant churches – emphasizes "man's finitude, his subjection to death, but above all, his estrangement from his true being and his bondage to demonic forces—forces of self-destruction." It was the prophetic role of secular culture in the twentieth century – in modernist art, in existentialist philosophy, and in psychoanalysis – to lay bare this predicament in its full anxiety and disruption. Modern art had not discovered a way of revivifying the traditional symbols of redemption and glory, such as resurrection, but they had succeeded in rediscovering the symbol of the Cross. "This is the Protestant element in the present situation," Tillich wrote of *Guernica*: "No premature solutions should be tried; rather, the human situation in its conflicts should be expressed courageously. If it is expressed, it is already transcended: He who can bear and express guilt shows that he already knows about 'acceptance-in-spite-of.' He who can bear and express meaninglessness shows that he experiences meaning within his desert of meaninglessness." Paul Tillich, "Protestantism and Artistic Style," in *Theology of Culture*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Tillich, *Morality and Beyond* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), dedication. Tillich's publisher initially wanted to call the book *Beyond Morality*, but he protested, pointing out that "for the more educated people, it would sound like Nietzsche's [*sic.*] 'Jenseits von Gut und Bose' and the others would not understand that it is a foundation of morality and certainly the term 'beyond' does not indicate the symbol of foundation." He wanted to call the book "The Religious Source of Moral Action." The title *Morality and*

he told the journalist Ved Mehta. "I was embarrassed by the dedication, since morality has always been a point with us... He's very otherworldly in his morality."<sup>38</sup> Tillich, although he always admired Niebuhr and felt he had saved Tillich's life by getting him hired at Union Theological Seminary, harbored his own private qualms about his friend. He thought that Ernest Jones's description of Freud applied to Niebuhr as well: "Someone whose instincts were far more powerful than those of the average man, but whose repressions were even more potent."<sup>39</sup>

Niebuhr suffered a major stroke in 1952 that significantly slowed his intellectual output and capped off a decline in his influence at Union that had already been afoot for several years. He was still popular among the liberal realists and national security types, churched and unchurched, who regarded him as the theologian of America's Cold War against communism. But among actual Protestant theologians – the faculty and students at Union, for example – his star was fading in comparison to Tillich's. Social ethics was out, psychology was in, and Tillich was the better poised to take advantage of the new fashion.<sup>40</sup> In 1950, the Union faculty made the young David H. Roberts, author of the recently published *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (1950), the Marcellus Hartley Professor of the Philosophy of Religion. Roberts was a brilliant, articulate, rotund, and often smiling presence who gradually replaced Niebuhr as Tillich's closest personal friend and

*Beyond* was apparently a compromise. See Paul Tillich to Elisabeth Wood, April 4, 1963, PTP, bMS 649/206.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 519.

<sup>39</sup> Bingham, *Courage to Change*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 203-5.

ally on the faculty.<sup>41</sup> Tillich was also close to John T. McNeill, Union's church historian, with whom he co-taught several seminars and whose still-classic *History of the Cure of Souls* (1950) traversed territory on the boundary between religion and psychology.<sup>42</sup> Harrison Elliot, a professor of religious education who had been around since the 1920s and who mentored the young Carl Rogers when the latter was a seminarian at Union, was another spokesperson on the faculty for the theological relevance of psychology. So were Seward Hiltner and Harry Bone – a pastoral theologian and a psychiatrist, respectively – who were lecturers on the faculty throughout the 1940s and 50s.<sup>43</sup> These presences signaled the slow rise to prominence, at one of America's premier institutions of liberal theology, of a movement – known variously as Religion and Health, the “Religio-Psychiatric movement,” pastoral counseling, and pastoral psychology – that had been burgeoning, mostly unseen, for over a generation. Although Tillich had very little to do with this movement in its early stages, it provided the essential precondition and context for his later writings on Christianity and psychoanalysis.

### **Liberal Protestantism's Psychological Turn**

<sup>41</sup> On Roberts, see Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 131, and Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 167, 174, 248. See also his trenchant book, *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (New York: Scribner, 1950), which borrows heavily from Tillich's theology. Roberts died abruptly of a heart attack in 1955, an event which occurred just as Tillich was retiring from Union Seminary and which came as a severe shock to him.

<sup>42</sup> John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper, 1951). Tillich and McNeill taught a course together on church history, of which McNeill later said that his own contribution (the rehearsal of basic facts and history) was “inevitable” while Tillich's contribution (the deeper meaning behind historical events) was “irresistible.” See Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 171.

<sup>43</sup> Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 116-17, 128-9, 134-5.

Attempts at collaboration between ministers and psychotherapists were perhaps at their peak during Tillich's time at Union in the early 1950s, but they were not exactly new. Haltingly and unevenly over the course of the first half of the twentieth century – and at first in a reformist/hygienic rather than in a psychoanalytic key – key leaders and spokesmen of Protestant liberalism in America began to assimilate psychotherapeutic models of mental health into their pastoral approaches and to adopt Freud's critique of religious moralism as their own. It may seem surprising Freud, the self-described "infidel Jew," could have had anything to offer to Protestant theology; for decades his name was anathema in most religious circles and was widely associated with sexual libertinism, atheism, and harsh critiques of organized religion. The convergence is less surprising when seen in light of what the historian William Hutchison called the "modernist impulse" in American Protestantism: the tradition of openness among some Protestant clergy to ideas and influences from the surrounding secular culture. In the eighteenth century this meant openness to Enlightenment rationalism and humanism. In the late nineteenth century it meant openness to Darwin and to the historical-critical-philological approach the New Testament. In the early twentieth century, it meant openness to the spirit of progressive reform, educational uplift, social engineering, and scientific management. And in the middle decades of the twentieth century it meant, above all, openness to the dynamic psychology of Freud.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

How did this rapprochement come about? The process of accommodation was far from straightforward. As Brooks Holifield shows in his thoughtful and suggestive history of pastoral counseling in the United States, the initial receptivity towards psychology in the mainline ministries stemmed from social, cultural, and intellectual factors: the intermingling of the liberal wings of the medical and ministerial establishments (especially in Boston and New York City); the practical problems pastors encountered in dealing with anxious, status-striving individuals in their congregations (usually members of the rising professional and managerial classes); and the competitive pressures church leaders faced from New Thought, mind-cure, positive-thinking, Christian Science, and all other manner of therapeutic ideologies. Scientific figures like William James, Edwin Starbuck, and other pioneers of the "psychology of religions" were also important in bridging the gap, on a theoretical level, between psychological health, social reform, moral self-improvement, and religious experience.<sup>45</sup>

One of the early and important – albeit abortive – experiments in institutionalized collaboration between the Protestant clergy and the medical profession was the Emmanuel Movement, a psychologically based approach to religious healing pioneered by the Rev. Elwood Worcester of the Emmanuel Church in Boston. Catered towards middle-class parishioners with nervous ailments, Emmanuel developed into a national program with branches as far away as Chicago and San Francisco. Worcester first got the idea for his approach from a prominent

<sup>45</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983), 184-209.

layman, the neurologist Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, of the Philadelphia parish where he served before moving to Boston. Mitchell proposed to Worcester that “you and I should get together and establish a work for the sick, basing it on sound religion and sound science.” Vitalist critics of modern overcivilization, Worcester and his followers recommended a free discharge of energy along the lines of what the psychologist William James proposed in his influential essays “The Gospel of Relaxation” and “The Energies of Man.” Yet the Emmanuel Movement leaders were ultimately interested in an ethic of self-control and self-mastery. The founding of Emmanuel actually predated the advent of psychoanalysis on the American scene, but the movement was at the height of its influence when Freud made his celebrated visit to Clark University in 1909. When asked about Emmanuel by a local newspaper, the founder of psychoanalysis responded skeptically: “When I think that there are many physicians who have been studying psychotherapy for decades who yet practice it with the greatest caution, this introduction of a few men without medical, or with only superficial medical, training, seems to be of questionable good.”<sup>46</sup> It was this kind of skepticism from the medical profession, which had been initially keen on Emmanuel but which eventually grew suspicious of its unseemly resemblance to New Thought and Christian Science, that ultimately led to the movement's collapse in the years before World War I. Still, it left an important

<sup>46</sup> Nathan Hale, *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 226.



legacy in forming ties between medical institutions, especially state mental hospitals, and progressive elements in the mainline churches.<sup>47</sup>

The dawning interest in mental health among the mainline clergy was ambivalently related to “mind-cure,” to “success” psychologies, to the “prosperity gospel,” and more generally to what the historian of American religion Sidney Ahlstrom called “harmonial religion.”<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, the early proponents of a psychologically informed ministry came mostly from patrician or high-bourgeois backgrounds, were dismissive or hostile towards popular success-culture, and took particular pains to distance themselves from what they saw as the superstitions of evangelical “faith healing” or Holiness-Pentecostal “divine healing gifts.” On the other hand, the popularity of movements like New Thought and Christian Science clearly also acted as a competitive spur for a profession in constant fear of being perceived as irrelevant, effeminate, or out of touch. Especially during the “religious depression” of the 20s and 30s – when church attendance, missionary activity, and charitable giving all declined precipitously – there was a common feeling that psychology was a useful tool by which the Church could win friends and influence people. According to Mark A. May’s report on *The Profession of the Ministry* (1934), “the psychology of business” was the dominant consideration of the laity in “the personal qualification of their ministers”:

They desired a minister who believed in his wares, who was loyal to his organization, who could organize his sales force, who could advertise his

<sup>47</sup> On the Emmanuel Movement, see Sanford Gifford, *The Emmanuel Movement: The Origins of Group Treatment and the Assault on Lay Psychotherapy* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997); John Greene, “The Emmanuel Movement, 1906-1929,” *New England Quarterly* 7 (1934): 494-532; Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 201-9; and Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 19-36.

<sup>48</sup> Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1019.

product, who could balance his budget, and show certain dividends in increased membership and added prestige for his particular church.<sup>49</sup>

No doubt many clergy were sensitive to these expectations, and a flood of advice-books for ministers with titles like *How to Advertise a Church* (1920), *How to Increase Your Sunday School Attendance* (1932), and *The Making of a Minister* (1927) promoted a model of the clergyman as a kind of gregarious, dapper, hyper-masculine business executive who used psychology to “get things done.” Yet, as the ironic tone of May’s report suggests, it was nevertheless a model that many ministers themselves – especially at the upper echelons of liberal Protestantism – resisted or resented.<sup>50</sup>

If the early push towards pastoral counseling and pastoral psychology partook of the spirit of progressive optimism and boosterism, it also drew from the scientific chill that pervaded the discourse of mental hygiene. The dominant metaphor of pastoral psychology in its early days was “adjustment.” “Adjustment,” a watchword across numerous realms of progressive reform during the early-to-mid twentieth century, was caricatured somewhat by later critics as connoting a sinister and conformist acquiescence to the given social order; in its heyday, however, it also carried a reformist, idealistic, and high-minded flavor that owed a great deal to its elaboration by John Dewey, the premier intellectual of American progressivism, secular and religious. In Dewey’s formulation, adjustment was a process by which individuals and their environments came to terms; rather than inoculating against the need for social reform, it implied such reform. It also assumed a compelling

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 217.

<sup>50</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 211-221.

interdependence of social and individual self-realization. For Deweyan-influenced liberal theologians such as the University of Chicago's Henry Nelson Wieman or Yale's Douglas Clyde MacIntosh, adjustment meant adjustment to God, namely to the "immanent process" or the "character of events" manifest in any given situation.<sup>51</sup> Such an idea of adjustment suggested a role for the pastor or religious educator as a kind of facilitator who brought out the individual's latent capacities for growth and active engagement with his environment in order to realize worthwhile ends. It also suggested – and here the critics of Dewey pragmatism had a point – that it was obvious what such worthwhile ends should be. Theories of adjustment – and especially "personality adjustment" – were especially popular in the religious education movement, the influential and decades-long effort to reorganize Protestant Sunday schools in accordance with Dewey's theories of educational development.<sup>52</sup>

Even more enduring than the efforts of religious educators was the attempt to add psychological training and supervised clinical experience to the curricula of mainline seminaries, what came in time to be known as "Clinical Pastoral Education" (CPE). In 1925, the eminent Boston physician Dr. Richard Cabot issued a call for all ministerial candidates to receive a year of clinical training on the model of similar, recently instituted programs in top medical and law schools. That same year, the Congregationalist minister and hospital chaplain Anton Boisen began supervising a small group of theological students in working with emotionally disturbed patients

<sup>51</sup> Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 237-56, 262-285.

<sup>52</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 221-231.

at Worcester State Hospital. In 1930, Cabot, Boisen, and Austin Philip Guiles, another liberal clergyman, formed the Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students in Boston, appointing Dr. Helen Flanders Dunbar as its director.<sup>53</sup> The original aim of CPE – now a staple of seminaries and divinity schools even in non-mainline denominations – was not to train pastoral counselors as such but rather to introduce young, green seminarians to the practical problems of urban and industrializing communities, in part to counter the stereotype of the sheltered and otherworldly minister. Cabot, an early theorist of CPE, was a stoical and hard-driving Boston patrician, the scion of an old and monied family. *The Art of Ministering to the Sick* (1936), the influential book he co-wrote with Russell Dicks, emphasized ethical formation, purposive growth, and strenuous adjustment to reality as the primary pastoral aims of the minister.<sup>54</sup> Steeped in Deweyan ideas about human development and physiological metaphors of organic growth, Cabot's signature concept was the “growing edge,” the frontier between organism and world that both affirmed the integrity of the person in his individual plans and purposes but also exposed those plans and purposes to the hard and often corrective facts of life. Cabot's personal maxim was, “Thou shalt grow by learning Reality.”<sup>55</sup>

The movement for the clinical training of ministers split into two factions – one based in Boston, the other in New York – during the 1930s. Dunbar moved the Council for Clinical Training to New York in 1932 while the Boston group formed its own organization, the New England Theological Schools Committee on Clinical

<sup>53</sup> Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 48-54, 51-89.

<sup>54</sup> Richard C. Cabot and Russell L. Dicks, *The Art of Ministering to the Sick* (Boston: Macmillan, 1936).

<sup>55</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 231-44.

Training, in 1938. Part of this split was a simple clash of egos, not unlike the similar sniping and factionalism so pervasive in psychoanalytic circles during the same period. As Henry Sloane Coffin, president of Union Theological Seminary, liked to quip, “the personality adjustment people can't adjust.” But there were also underlying social and cultural cleavages, as well as disagreements about human nature and the aims of counseling. The Boston group, led by Cabot, was more deeply rooted in the scientific/medical establishment, in models of rational self-governance and character formation, in mental hygiene, and in the respectable “personalism” of Boston University theologians like Borden Parker Bowne and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. The New York group, led by Boisen and Dunbar and later by Seward Hiltner, tended to be younger, brasher, more socially *déclassé*, and more fully open to the cultural and sexual radicalism of psychoanalysis and its offshoots. The New Yorkers were also more impressed by the chaotic and disruptive character of the inner life, and more intent on discouraging authoritarian, repressive, moralistic, or legalistic tendencies in the pastorate. While the Boston group stressed pastoral competence, the watchword of the New Yorker clinical supervisors during the 1930s was “understanding.”<sup>56</sup>

The Religion and Health movement was shaped by the distinctive biographies of its founders, a colorful group that was prone to nervous ailments and spiritual/psychological crises. Harry Emerson Fosdick, who perhaps more than anyone else would popularize the association between therapists and ministers, experienced both a late-Victorian crisis of faith during his teens and a major episode

<sup>56</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 244-9.

of depression and neurasthenia after moving to New York City from Buffalo in his twenties.<sup>57</sup> Anton Boisen suffered two major nervous breakdowns – both driven, to greater or lesser extents, by guilty sexual fantasies about a woman for whom he had harbored an unrequited love since childhood. While Boisen never denied a sexual dimension to his episodes, he also attributed a cosmic significance to them and always insisted – sometimes to the consternation of his doctors and colleagues – that his terrifying brushes with mental illness ultimately helped him in his life, gave him compassion for fellow sufferers, and disclosed a larger, religious purpose.<sup>58</sup> In *Exploration of the Inner World* (1936), he recounted his own observation of fellow patients at Boston Psychopathic Hospital while recovering from the delirium of his first episode:

It came over me like a flash that if inner conflicts like that which Paul describes in the famous passage in the seventh chapter of Romans can have happy solutions, as the church has always believed, there must also be unhappy solutions which thus far the church has ignored. It came to me that what I was being faced with in the hospital were the unhappy solutions. Most of the patients whom I saw around me would then be in the hospital because of spiritual or religious difficulties.<sup>59</sup>

Emotional collapse, in Boise's telling and experience, was a chaotic encounter with God that could result either in complete disintegration or in a new, more powerful synthesis.

In the words of Allison Stokes, the historian of the mainline churches' reckoning with Freud, "the Religion and Health movement began as a movement in

<sup>57</sup> Garry Dorian, *The Making of Liberal Theology*, 357-60. See also Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> On Boisen, see Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 39-44 as well as his autobiography, *The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, 1936).

<sup>59</sup> Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World*, 5.

tension with and parallel to the Social Gospel.”<sup>60</sup> Certainly the growing ministerial interest in psychology – especially the dynamic psychology of Freud – reflected a level of disillusionment with the crusading, unreflective style characteristic of a good deal of Social Gospel progressivism, especially in supporting World War I and Prohibition. Meanwhile, a certain number of old-line Social Gospelers regarded the fashion for psychology as an exercise in narcissism, an escape from pressing social problems, and a distraction from the urgent tasks of building the Kingdom of God on Earth. In *Theism and the Modern Mood* (1930), Oberlin's professor of theology Walter Marshall Horton complained that “books on the ‘social gospel’ have been largely set aside in favor of manuals of devotion, studies of mystics, and books on applied psychology and mental hygiene.”<sup>61</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, who supported the therapeutic turn, complained that he was often told by his liberal ministerial colleagues to “stop fussing about yourself; stop taking your own spiritual temperature; get away from yourself.”<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, most of the Religion and Health leaders were themselves veterans of the Social Gospel. They did not think of their healing mission as in any way compromising the broader struggle for social or economic justice. On the contrary, mental health and mental hygiene were seen as essential ingredients – perhaps even as preconditions – to any just social settlement, as between nations, between the races, or between capital and labor. “Personal

<sup>60</sup> Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 145.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Marshall Horton, *Theism and the Modern Mood* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 385.

unbalance *never* leads to social stability," as the Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman – another prophet of pastoral psychology – wrote in *Peace of Mind* (1946).<sup>63</sup>

The goal of "adjustment," as Holfield has shown, gradually gave way to the more inward ideals of "understanding" and "insight" in the rhetoric and practice of the psychological ministry during the 1930s and early 1940s. This shift occurred against the backdrop of the general darkening of the intellectual mood that accompanied the rise of fascism, the impending threat and eventual arrival of another world war, and mounting disillusionment with the Soviet Union's leadership of the global struggle for social justice. It was also driven by changes within both psychotherapy and liberal theology. On the psychotherapeutic side, the profession was refashioned by the wave of European analysts, mostly Jewish, that began emigrating, mostly to New York City, after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. The emigres brought with them a climate of opinion that was self-consciously cosmopolitan, erudite, culturally pessimistic, and Freudian, at least in the broad sense if not necessarily in terms of specific allegiance to psychoanalytic orthodoxy; this sensibility jibed well with the proclivities of the native-born pioneers of Protestant pastoral psychology in New York, people like Boisen, Dunbar, Seward Hiltner, Rollo May, David Roberts, and Harry Bone. On the religious side, theologians like Niebuhr and Tillich were taking aim at Deweyan-influenced theologies of "process," "personality," and "adjustment" as naive or even idolatrous forms of faith in human possibility. The will of God, warned the "realist" theologians, should not be

<sup>63</sup> Joshua Loth Liebman, *Peace of Mind: Insights on Human Nature that Can Change Your Life* (New York: Citadel, 1998 [1946]), 6.



confused with human aspiration; this was a theology of suspicion that refused to take professions of good will, moral progress, and social betterment on their face. Thomas Bingham, of General Theological Seminary in New York, best summed up the new sensibility in a debate with a representative of the Boston wing of the clinical movement: "There is something to be said for a morbid view as a good thing."<sup>64</sup>

The figure who best encapsulated the psychological and therapeutic trends in American Protestantism during this period – and the transition from “adjustment” to “insight” – was Harry Emerson Fosdick: radio personality, celebrity preacher, and professor of divinity at Union Theological Seminary. Fosdick made his name publishing slim devotional volumes and defending theological modernism against its fundamentalist critics within the mainline churches. But beginning in the mid-1920s, his interests drifted in the direction of pastoral care and counseling. Fosdick's enormously popular self-help book *On Being a Real Person* (1943) was written out of his experience offering advice to troubled parishioners over the years. His approach – both as a counselor and as a preacher – combined friendly exhortation, literary flair, positive thinking, good-natured wit, and insights into depression and nervousness drawn partly from his own personal experience. Fosdick was very much a charismatic “success” figure, in the mold of 1920s encomiums to “pep” and “energy,” but he also had a more compassionate side that tempered his instincts towards moralistic uplift and strained optimism. When Reinhold Niebuhr began his assault on Social Gospel liberalism in the early 1930s,

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 248.

Fosdick responded by admitting, as he stated in a famous and self-critical sermon, that “The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism.”<sup>65</sup> He originally became interested in the clinical side of ministry as a side project to his main business of preaching at the First Presbyterian Church at New York City; the exposure to difficult cases left him feeling both intrigued and beyond his depth. He enlisted the help of his friend Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, a leader in the national mental hygiene movement, who became his clinical tutor. When John D. Rockefeller agreed to build a grand new church for Fosdick in Morningside Heights – what became the Riverside Church – the original plan was for Fosdick and Salmon to run a clinic there, “where the resources of medical science and Christian ministry would be combined in the help of troubled minds.”<sup>66</sup> Salmon's untimely death prevented the idea from coming to fruition, but Fosdick persisted both in seeing patient-parishioners and in infusing his sermons and radio addresses with psychological themes. Through his nationally syndicated radio program, *National Vespers*, Fosdick's psychological gospel reached millions of lay and clerical listeners.<sup>67</sup>

By the eve of the Second World War, an institutional framework was emerging both within and between the mainline denominations that fostered active collaboration between doctors of the mind and doctors of the soul. The Federal Council of Churches, the primary ecumenical association for churches of the Protestant mainline, played a significant role in effecting this rapprochement,

<sup>65</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, “The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism,” in *Answers to Real Problems: Harry Emerson Fosdick Speaks to Our Time*, ed. Mark E. Yurs (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 101-109.

<sup>66</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), vii. See also Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick*, 251-84.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick*, 379-88.

forming a Joint Committee on Religion and Health in 1927 and a full-fledged Commission of Religion and Health, with Seward Hiltner as its executive secretary, in 1937. Hiltner, who got his start in clinical training under Boisen through the Council of Clinical Training for Theological Students, became a one-man nexus for Religion and Health, organizing numerous conferences and symposia, writing prolifically in the field of pastoral theology, and leading several of the most prominent institutions of the movement.<sup>68</sup> The year 1937 also saw the establishment of the Religio-Psychiatric Clinic at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City under the direction of the psychiatrist Smiley Blanton and the minister/self-help guru Norman Vincent Peale. The Blanton-Peale clinic has not been taken very seriously by historians due to its association with Peale, a figure justifiably regarded as a peddler of vacuous success ideologies by all manner of critics, Tillich included.<sup>69</sup> But as Stokes has pointed out, the clinic itself subsequently evolved into the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, an organization that became – independent of Peale's influence – a major hub of dialogue, funding, and publication in the field of pastoral counseling.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> On Hiltner, see Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 116-117.

<sup>69</sup> Tillich and Peale had a small spat in 1960, when Tillich told a newspaper reporter that Peale “uses religion to re-adapt people to the demands of industrial society; he teaches executives of corporations, for example, who cannot continue in their jobs, how to adjust.” Peale responded with an affronted letter demanding an apology and condemning “such distinct disregard of facts.” Tillich replied by claiming that he had been taken out of context but admitting that “I am rather critical of some of your writings. The criticism is directed against a basic attitude which I see in your work,” namely “the idea that religion can be made into a tool for anything else—even for the healing of psychological disturbances. Religion may have secondarily this effect, but decisive is that it first of all stands upon itself and the service of that which is ultimate in our life beyond health, social adaptation, peace of mind, and so on.” Norman Vincent Peale to Paul Tillich, April 23, 1960 and Tillich to Norman Vincent Peale, April 27, 1960, PTP, bMS 649/174.

<sup>70</sup> Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 105-8.

The Second World War was a watershed for Religion and Health: the war quickened the pace of psychological-ministerial dialogue, bolstered the overall prestige of clinical psychology, and exposed military chaplains to extreme, life-and-death scenarios for which the older pastoral traditions of gentlemanly counsel and moral exhortation were obviously inadequate. As Wayne Oates, one of the early leaders of CPE, put it, "Chaplains were coming back after having been through hell. They saw that the neat, flat consciousness psychologies they had learned before did not take into account the tragedies they had seen."<sup>71</sup> In 1942, under the aegis of Columbia University's Seminar on Religion and Health, Seward Hiltner organized a group of psychoanalysts, psychologists, theologians, ministers, and laypeople calling itself the New York Psychology Group (NYPG) to discuss the relationship between religion and mental health amid the cataclysm of world war.<sup>72</sup> The group's members included Tillich, the neo-Freudian analyst Erich Fromm, the humanist psychologists Rollo May and Carl Rogers, the cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict, and Tillich's UTS colleague David Roberts; the NYPG's discussions will be taken up fully in the next chapter. Meanwhile, the services that psychologists were able to offer to the American war effort – boosting troop morale, monitoring public opinion, interpreting the "mind" of the Axis powers, and elaborating the features of "democratic" versus "authoritarian" personalities – provided the occasion for an alliance between the psychological profession and the federal government that

<sup>71</sup> Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> On the NYPG, see Terry Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology: Historic and Contemporary Explorations in Theology, Psychotherapy, and Ethics* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 99-194 and Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 115-145.

bolstered the prestige of clinical counseling well into the postwar era. The success of relatively simple talking cures in treating “war neuroses” and in returning troops to the battlefield raised confidence in the ability of psychologists to treat all manner of private ills and to proffer their views on innumerable questions of public policy.<sup>73</sup>

The postwar era is well-known as a golden age for both psychological expertise and institutional religion in America; what is not as well appreciated is the confluence of these two trends in the explosion of pastoral psychology. Conferences, symposia, and seminars devoted to the topic proliferated under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches (reorganized as the National Council of Churches in 1950), the Menninger Foundation, the National Medical Association for Mental Health, and numerous other professional associations and philanthropies. Beginning in 1950, the journal *Pastoral Psychology* became the national mouthpiece of the movement; it quickly became, along with Charles Clayton Morrison’s old-line pacifist journal *Christian Century* and Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realist magazine *Christianity and Crisis*, one of the flagship publications of the liberal mainline more generally.<sup>74</sup> In 1956, the departing president of the American Psychiatric Association, R. Finley Gayle, Jr., gave his farewell address on the “Conflict and Cooperation between Psychiatry and Religion.” That same year, Union Theological Seminary established a full-time chair in psychology, paving the way for similar

<sup>73</sup> Ellen Hermann, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in an Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>74</sup> For an excellent history of *Christianity and Crisis*, see Mark Halthuser, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999). For *Christian Century*, see Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The journal *Pastoral Psychology* awaits its historian.

appointments at other seminaries and divinity schools.<sup>75</sup> As the historian Matthew Hedstrom has shown, books about psychology were among the most common recommendations of the religious book clubs and lists that did so much to shape the reading habits of liberal Protestant ministers and laypeople during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>76</sup> Among the popular of these titles was *Peace of Mind* (1946), in which the Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman "addressed himself to the individual whose personal grief and anxiety, unassuageable by social betterment alone, required an inner peace that psychology and religion, working together, could provide."<sup>77</sup>

By the late 1950s, the association between psychology and liberal Protestantism was so well-known that it became a subject of polemic and even caricature. A memorable scene from John Updike's tragic-comic novel *Rabbit, Run* (1959) has Jack Eccles, a hapless Episcopal clergyman from small-town Pennsylvania, consulting with his older, more conservative Lutheran colleague about how to approach the case of the novel's philandering and absconding husband of a protagonist, Rabbit Angstrom. After Eccles gives a loquacious account of his various dealings with the Angstroms, his understanding of the family dynamic, and his attempts to bring Rabbit back into the domestic fold, his plainspoken ministerial colleague interrupts, lambasting Eccles for this fussy meddling in the lives of his congregation. "Do you think," asks Kruppenbach, the older minister, "do you think this is your job, to meddle in these people's lives? I know what they teach you at

<sup>75</sup> Jason Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 205.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 172-213.

<sup>77</sup> Liebman, *Peace of Mind*, 45.

seminary now: this psychology and that. But I don't agree with it. You think now your job is to be an unpaid doctor, to run around and plug up the holes and make everything smooth." Eccles, humiliated and furious at being subjected to this "insane spiel," leaves the house, despite Kruppenbach's offer to kneel and say a prayer with him. But he is badly shaken by the encounter and cannot help repeating "*He's right, he's right*" to himself as he sits outside behind the wheel of his car.<sup>78</sup> Updike later admitted that Kruppenbach was meant to be a stand-in for the great Swiss theologian of neo-orthodoxy, Karl Barth.<sup>79</sup> Other, later critiques of Freud's baleful influence in the churches came from the behaviorist psychologist O. Hobart Mowrer, the cultural critic Philip Rieff, the psychoanalyst Karl Menninger, and the psychologist Paul Vitz.<sup>80</sup>

Even so, the psychological approach to ministry and theology continued to boom throughout the postwar period. In *God and Freud* (1959), the journalist Leonard Gross hailed "the movement to incorporate the new science with ancient theology"; the meeting of religion and therapy, in his view, was "inextricably blended into the much-advertised religious revival of the United States" and accounted for "a good part of the enthusiasm with which many Americans, emerging from a period of religious skepticism, are embracing their faiths today." The new prestige of psychology in the mainline denominations was visible everywhere: in

<sup>78</sup> John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960), 142-44.

<sup>79</sup> Marshall Boswell, *John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 16-18.

<sup>80</sup> O. Hobart Mowrer, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1961); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973); and Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

the dawning awareness of many formerly “authoritarian” clergy that “in acting as moral policemen they have created anxiety and insecurity among some of their congregants”; in the revival of the hospital chaplaincy, “so that today a chaplain is a respected man in the church hierarchy” instead of “a chap who would ‘get a parish’ once his luck had turned”; in the use of psychological testing to weed out candidates for ordination who were in fact “seeking escape from emotionally turbulent pasts”; in the overhaul of Protestant Sunday School curricula, “sometimes it the direct assistance of psychiatrists and psychologists, but invariably with the aim of incorporating psychiatric insights.” Gross also noted the continued flow of funding and institutional support for Religion and Health: a large grant from the National Mental Health Institute beginning in 1956 funded programs for the psychological training of theological students at Harvard, Yeshiva, and Loyola (Chicago) Universities. The program at Loyola, a Jesuit school, signaled a thaw between psychological professions and parts of the Roman Catholic clergy as well, what had been, in Gross's words, “the most passionately opposed to psychiatry at the outset and the last to soften their view.”<sup>81</sup>

Tillich remained somewhat aloof from all of these efforts – he was a haphazard administrator and tended to shy from formal leadership positions in organizations, ecclesiastical or otherwise – but he was nevertheless involved with them. In 1955, the year he left Union and began a new appointment at Harvard, he accepted the invitation of the National Council of Churches to become a member of the Department of Pastoral Services, although his move from New York to

<sup>81</sup> Leonard Gross, *God and Freud* (New York: D. McKay, 1959), 5-7, 21.



Cambridge meant that he was rarely able to attend meetings.<sup>82</sup> Along with Seward Hiltner, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Paul Johnson, Earl Loomis, and Carrol Wise, he was an editorial advisor and regular contributor to *Pastoral Theology*, and was also published intermittently in the other, smaller pastoral journals, the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, and the *Journal of Clinical Pastoral Work*.<sup>83</sup> Tillich's HDS colleague Hans Hoffman consulted him frequently on his management of the University Project on Religion and Mental Health, Harvard's share of the grant from the National Mental Health Institute.<sup>84</sup> When the American Academy of Religion and Health was founded in 1953, Tillich gave the address at the first annual meeting; he eventually joined the organization's advisory council and professional board; in 1962 he was given its annual award, despite his protest to the organizers that "I have not deserved it in view of the long period in which I could not much contribute to the work of the Academy."<sup>85</sup>

Even so, the pastoral-psychological trend within American Protestantism provided the platform, context, and occasion for which Tillich developed his distinctive synthesis between the insights of modern depth psychology and the classical doctrines of historic Christianity. Tillich always did his most significant intellectual work with a specific audience in mind. And even though he kept his institutional commitments to a minimum, it was in the course of preparing for his many appearances before various associations, institutes, centers, clinics, seminars,

<sup>82</sup> Paul Tillich to Douglas Horton, PTP, bMS 649/153.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Tillich and Simon Donninger correspondence, PTP, bMS 649/137.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Tillich and Hans Hoffman correspondence, PTP, bMS 649/153.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Tillich to Harry Meserve, February 13, 1962, correspondence with the Academy of Religion and Mental Health, PTP, bMS 649/116.

and discussion groups – the entire sprawling network of Religion and Health that was in full swing by the early 1950s – that Tillich came to refine his thinking on the theoretical and practical relations between psychotherapy and theology. The Religion and Health movement, in turn, relied extensively on Tillich's insights, formulations, and popularity both within and outside the churches to propel their movement into a position of leadership in the liberal mainline. In a retrospective upon Tillich's death in 1965, Seward Hiltner claimed that the theologian's relationship with *Pastoral Psychology* was “in many ways the greatest thing that happened to the journal.”<sup>86</sup> Tillich was, by general consensus, the chief theoretician of Religion and Health and one of its major spokesman. It is to his sharpest and most effective statements on the relationship between psychotherapy and Christianity that we now turn.

### **Theology and Psychoanalysis: The Tillichian Synthesis**

Tillich loved etymologies; one of his favorites was “salvation,” which comes from the Latin word *salvus*, meaning “heal” and “whole.” A savior in the ancient world was one who made people “heal and whole” – such as Jesus, who called himself a physician, or like the Greek healing god Asclepius, who was referred to as the Savior, or like the founders of the Hellenistic philosophical schools, who promised health to their adherents through the therapy of wisdom. Such connections showed the link, which had been severed throughout most of the Church's history, between religion and medicine. But the word salvation also meant

<sup>86</sup> Seward Hiltner, “Tillich the Person: A Review Article,” *Theology Today* 30, no. 4 (1974): 383.

delivering, liberating, setting free – as from the demonic powers that were widely thought to govern the world in ancient times. The original meaning of salvation, Tillich argued, had nothing to do with “escaping from hell and being received in heaven, in what is badly called ‘the life hereafter.’” The “Eternal Life” that Jesus promises to his followers does not refer to a continuation of life after death – “we are mortal like every creature,” Tillich wrote in one of his sermons, “mortal with our whole being—body and soul” – but rather to the possibility of participation in an ever-present Eternity that is “beyond past, present and future: we come from it, we live in its presence, we return to it.” The demonic powers – which in the twentieth century included neurotic and psychotic illness, as well as the ideological possessions of fascism and communism – separate us from this eternal life, keeping us sick and in bondage. And salvation occurs, albeit in a partial and preliminary way, “whenever the enslaving power is conquered, whenever the wall is broken through, whenever the sickness is healed.”<sup>87</sup>

The first of depth psychology's contributions to modern theology was, as Tillich put it in an address to the American Academy of Religion and Mental Health in 1960, the “thorough re-examination” it had provoked of “the doctrines which were called ‘order of salvation’ and ‘the Christian life’ and which tried to describe first the way of the Christian from ‘conversion’ to ‘sanctification,’ and then his experiences and actions as a mature Christian.”<sup>88</sup> In theological terms, this is what is

<sup>87</sup> Paul Tillich, “Salvation,” in *The Eternal Now*, 113-115.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought,” address delivered to the First Annual Meeting of the Academy of Religion and Mental Health, January 14, 1960, PTP, bMS 649/83 (4), 9.

often called “soteriology.” Tillich criticized what his Union colleague and friend Dave Roberts called the “static,” as against the “dynamic,” view of salvation. The former imposed an “obligatory pattern without regard to the specific needs and capacities of the growing and changing individual,” as Roberts put it in *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (1950).<sup>89</sup> A dynamic view of salvation, in contrast, took its cues from “the psychoanalytic pattern of a non-judging and non-directing acceptance of the mentally disturbed.” The secular therapist in his unconditional acceptance of his patients thus provided a model for Christian forgiveness and love that had formerly been the province of religious healing but that had been lost by American Protestantism in its more interdictory and moralistic forms. “It is an astonishing fact,” Tillich told the Academy of Religion and Mental Health, “that Protestant theology had to rediscover its own tradition about what man is and about what healing powers are through the impact of the psychology of the unconscious.”<sup>90</sup>

Tillich emphasized that this was nothing new. While Protestantism had badly neglected its pastoral, Tillich was respectful towards Roman Catholicism for preserving, in its penitential, devotional, and monastic practices of self-scrutiny, a comparatively subtle sense of what he called “the endless variety of human predicaments, aberrations and virtue”; like others at the time he drew a parallel between the therapeutic interview and the confessional, between the therapist-analyst and the priest-confessor. The role of both was to accept the sick person, not

<sup>89</sup> Roberts, *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man*, 187.

<sup>90</sup> Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought,” 4, 6.

in the mode of permissiveness but rather in spite of that person's guilt and unacceptability. This acceptance was a person-to-person experience that also pointed "something third," the acceptance of both the healer and the healed by a larger reality of acceptance. Christianity had traditionally called this act "forgiveness," but because that word came to imply the superiority of the person who forgives and the humiliation of the person forgiven, Tillich came to prefer the psychoanalytic language of "acceptance." "I believe that all the forms of confessional in the churches, and the confessions between friends and married people, and now the psychoanalytic confession of one's deeper levels, which are opened up by the analyst – that without these things there is no possibility of experiencing healing – of which, however, I would say it belongs ultimately to another dimension," he told Carl Rogers.<sup>91</sup>

Tillich attributed the gradual loss of this healing role for the Church to the moralism of the Calvinistic-Evangelical tradition and to the doctrinal rigidity of later Lutheranism, beneath which the salvific – healing and liberating – core of the Christian message was buried. It was only when "mental disturbance became a mass phenomenon" around the time of World War II, "hampering both war effort and business progress," that "the disturbed theological students, together with many other disturbed active members of the congregations sought help, not from a minister, but a psychoanalyst" and "the churches began to realize that something was wrong in their preaching and teaching." This was a simplification of the Religion

<sup>91</sup> See "Paul Tillich and Carl Rogers: A Dialogue," in *Carl Rogers—Dialogues: Conversations with Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, B.F. Skinner, Gregory Bateson, Michael Polanyi, Rollo May, and Others* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 64-78.

and Health movement's history, which began well before World War II. Yet Tillich was correct in identifying it as a movement of younger clergy, seminarians, and laypeople in the mainline churches in response to the psychic and political upheavals of the twentieth century. Psychoanalysis, Tillich noted, "became the model for Christian counseling, and through counseling, for teaching, and through teaching, for theological inquiry."<sup>92</sup>

Most of the practitioners of psychoanalysis, including its founder, were of course secular Jews – but this did not detract in any way from the Christian character of their example, from Tillich's perspective. Jesus's significance, as he constantly emphasized, lay not in his giving laws or teachings, nor in any talismanic or miraculous quality he possessed, nor, especially, in his establishment of Christianity as a religion among other religions. It lay, rather, in his proclamation and personal embodiment of "good news," of a new and all-embracing reality, of radical "acceptance 'in spite of,'" of a healing power in the world that by its very ontological nature was available to all peoples and in all situations.<sup>93</sup> "The rapprochement between theology and medicine in our time," moreover, had "brought a great liberation by opening a new way for preaching about the healing stories in the New Testament."<sup>94</sup> In the biblical tales of individuals possessed by demons, Tillich saw a series of parables about sickness and healing that confirmed the insights of modern depth psychology. The biblical demoniacs, according to Tillich, came to Jesus

<sup>92</sup> Tillich, "The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought," 6, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Tillich, "Salvation," in *The Eternal Now*, 116.

<sup>94</sup> Tillich, "The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought," 9.

split, contradicting themselves, disgusted and despairing about themselves, hateful of themselves and therefore hostile towards everybody else; afraid of life, burdened with guilt feelings, accusing and excluding themselves, fleeing from others into loneliness, fleeing from themselves to others, trying finally to escape from the threats of existence into the painful and deceptive safety of mental and bodily disease.<sup>95</sup>

Jesus announced to these people that they were accepted in spite of their guilt, distress, and hostility. He “conquered the demons by discovering the mystery of the power embodied in their names, just as we today try to find out the hidden names of the powers that disrupt our unconscious depths and drive us to mental disturbances.”<sup>96</sup> The Gospels also tell of how Jesus's power to cast out demons provoked extreme anxiety among the afflicted themselves, anticipating the modern-day psychoanalytic insight that “the mentally sick are afraid of the process of healing, because it throws them out of the limited but safe house of their neurotic self-seclusion.”<sup>97</sup>

“Heal and whole”: by not distinguishing between physical and mental ailments, the biblical healing stories also illustrated a commonplace assumption of the ancient world, largely forgotten by schizophrenic modernity but recovered by way of modern psychology, that “becoming healthy means becoming whole, reunited, in one's bodily and psychic functions.” Here Tillich was leaning on the holistic organismic theories of his friend the neurologist and Gestalt theorist Kurt Goldstein more than on classical psychoanalysis itself, which tended to privilege the inner life of conflicts and complexes as the seat of all mental and physical disease.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Tillich, “On Healing (I),” in *The New Being*, 38.

<sup>96</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Divine Name,” in *The Eternal Now*, 92.

<sup>97</sup> Tillich, “On Healing (I),” in *The New Being*, 38.

Still, Freud did sometimes mention what he called a “parallelism” between body and mind and psychoanalysis raised awareness of the entanglement between physical and mental afflictions.<sup>98</sup> In any case, healing for Tillich means healing the whole person – in that person’s physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. Rather than “levels” of human personality, Tillich preferred to speak of “dimensions.” A level of existence – such as the physical level or the mental level – is implicitly separate from the other levels. By speaking the language of dimensions, Tillich stressed the holistic unity of human persons, in which a disease in one dimension – or, correspondingly, an act of healing – registers in all of the others.<sup>99</sup> The wise physician “is he who does not easily cut off parts and does not easily suppress the one function in favor of the other, but he who strengthens the whole so that within the unity of the body the struggling elements can be reconciled.”<sup>100</sup> The skillful healer knows “that disease that seems bodily may be mental at root, and that a disease that seems individual may be social at the same time, and that you cannot heal individuals without liberating them from the social demons that have contributed to their sickness.”<sup>101</sup>

Under the fallen and finite conditions of human existence, the healing that occurs within each dimension is necessarily fragmentary and incomplete. Specialized helpers are possible and necessary, but they cannot effect universal healing as long as everyone belongs to a larger reality that is still, in spite of its

<sup>98</sup> See Katja Guenther, *Localization and Its Discontents: A Genealogy of Psychoanalysis and the Neuro Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Ann Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: Norton, 1999).

<sup>99</sup> On “dimensions” versus “levels,” see Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 15-17.

<sup>100</sup> Tillich, “On Healing (I),” in *The New Being*, 39.

<sup>101</sup> Tillich, “Heal the Sick; Cast Out the Demons,” in *The Eternal Now*, 63.



essential unity, estranged from itself. As Tillich wrote in his address to the Academy of Religion and Mental Health:

in a particular case, tuberculosis may be healed, but not a neurotic condition of the patient. Or compulsive withdrawal may be healed but perhaps not an arteriosclerotic condition of the heart. Or this also may be healed, but not despair about the commanding character of the moral law and the feeling of meaninglessness about the cultural contents. This also may be healed but perhaps not the doubt about the validity of the religious symbols and the feeling of profound guilt about these doubts. Or this also may be healed but not the total despair about the meaning of history and one's own historical existence.<sup>102</sup>

Tillich's last example – despair about the meaning of history and one's own historical existence – pointed towards the social character of healing; hence, he says, political leaders in the ancient world were also called “saviors” because they healed the body politic. There is ultimately no individual salvation because none of us is isolated:

We belong to our past, to our families, classes, groups, nations, cultures. And in all of them health and illness are fighting with each other. How can we be whole if the culture is split within itself, if every value is denied by another one, if every truth is questioned, if every decision is good and bad at the same time? How can we be whole if the institutions in which we live create temptations, conflicts, catastrophes too heavy for each of us? How can we be whole if we are connected, often intimately connected with people who are in discord with themselves, in hostility against us, or if we have to live with people, individuals, groups, nations who are irreconciled and sick?

This was the agonized question to which the New Testament picture of Jesus provided the answer. Again: not as an historical personage or a miracle-worker capable of suspending the laws of nature, but rather as the symbol of the fully realized personality who “does not cut off anything or suppress anything that belongs to life,” who “is the reality of reconciliation, because in Him a new reality

<sup>102</sup> Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought,” 11.

has come upon us in which we and our whole existence are accepted and reunited.”<sup>103</sup>

The second area in which Tillich saw a positive contribution from psychotherapy to Protestant theology engaged more directly with Freud’s famous criticisms of religion in general and western monotheism in particular. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud had argued that the concept of God was based on a projection of what he called the “father-image.” Religion was a self-protecting “illusion” based upon wish fulfillment: a tool of civilizational authority and a personal defense – or “reaction formation” – against the ambiguities of life and the terrors of death. Whereas a rational and mature perspective (like that fostered by psychoanalysis, for example) could face up with courage to the inevitable loneliness and conflicts of existence, religion fostered childlike fantasies of total reconciliation. Conscience, far from being an inward voice calling individuals back to their essential selves, was in fact the internalization of parental authority. Guilt emerged not from an appraisal of one’s own intrinsically evil actions but rather – after the pattern of the Oedipus complex – out of a native aggression that has been thwarted and redirected inwardly against the id. Religion, in turn, was built upon guilt about one’s own primal rebellion against an overbearing father figure. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), his final work, Freud depicted Moses as a demanding and tyrannical leader who had tried to impose his severe creed on his people – to “civilize” them – but was ultimately murdered by an unruly “primal horde.” Horrified by what they had done, the Jews collectively repressed the memory of this

<sup>103</sup> Tillich, “On Healing (I),” in *The New Being*, 41-2.

filial rebellion and learned, in time, to adopt Moses's God and obey his commandments as a way of expiating their guilt. This was the pattern of all religion; as Freud wrote in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), society was "based on complicity in the common crime; religion was based on the sense of the guilt and remorse attached to it; while morality was based partly on the exigencies of this society and partly on the penance demanded by the sense of guilt."<sup>104</sup>

Tillich denied some elements of this harsh portrayal: he regarded the assessment of Moses as fantastical and countered Freud's picture of religion as an illusion by pointing out that every "projection" implies a "screen" – the "screen of the unconditional" – on which fundamental wishes and desires are cast. But he freely acknowledged that projection and wish fulfillment were real and pervasive phenomena in religion.<sup>105</sup> The "father-image," meanwhile, was indeed a human construct drawn from the social and cultural surround, especially the experiences of early childhood. Tillich's own father, as we will see in a later chapter, was an overbearing and looming figure, a high official in the German Lutheran church with whom Tillich was engaged in a longstanding and guilty struggle for primacy – at first

<sup>104</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010); *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Kathrine Jones (New York: Vintage, 1939); *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 2010), 121.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Tillich, "Psychiatry and Theology," Theological Discussion Group, Washington, D.C., November 2, 1956, PTP, bMS 649/49 (20), 3. As Tillich wrote in a review of Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950), "Freud's theory of projection like every theory of projection since Feuerbach confuses two things, that which is projected and that at which it is projected, 'the picture' and the 'screen.' There can be no doubt that the concrete material out of which the images of the gods are made is rooted in healthy as well as in distorted experiences in childhood and later. But this does not mean that the screen, namely the ultimate of being and meaning, the ground and aim of existence, is itself a projection. The question, therefore, for theology and psychotherapy is not the removal of the screen, but the interpretation and the purification of the symbolic expressions of our relation to it. And this task can and must unite psychoanalysis and religion." See Paul Tillich, "*Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm, book review," written for *Pastoral Psychology*, 1951, PTP, bMS 649/86 (12), 1.

for the affections of his mother and then later over intellectual and theological questions. Tillich knew first-hand the Oedipal struggles between fathers and sons that determined childhood patterns of belief and, he admitted, sometimes threatened to seep into even his own theological formulations, as in doctrines “God, guilt, ultimate judgment, etc.” He commended psychotherapy and pastoral counseling for having “helped to reintroduce the female element, so conspicuously lacking in most Protestantism, into the idea of God.” For many naïve believers, the images of God never advanced beyond childish fantasies of protection and parental omnipotence. For them, Freud’s critique was another necessary instance of what Tillich identified as a perennial duty of all good theology, what he referred to as the “Protestant principle”: the protest against idolatry, the reservation against partial or excessively human images of divinity, the resistance to identifying any preliminary element of reality with the ultimate reality that is God.<sup>106</sup>

Still, Tillich considered it as inevitable that people’s ultimate concern would be expressed using symbols drawn from their culture and environment. This was the inherent nature of religious symbols: they used conditional elements from the immediately encountered reality to point towards the unconditioned reality lying beyond time and space and finite circumstance. In this vein, Tillich offered a limited defense of the “father-image” – as well as of the monarchical conception of God – insofar as it had once been an adequate symbol of ultimate concern. In patriarchal cultures and families, fathers (like kings) are figures of consummate power and importance; it is unsurprising and even necessary that they would be taken up as

<sup>106</sup> Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thinking,” 5.

religious symbols. In general, humanity tends to use personal, “anthropomorphic” symbols for God because God, as the creative ground of everything – including everything personal – cannot be symbolized by anything less than the personal. All symbols, including the symbol of God the Father, are bearers of the ultimate; they have the potential to become demonic when they are elevated in themselves to the status of ultimacy, i.e. taken literally. Tillich believed that religious consciousness moved in three stages: the “natural,” pre-critical stage in which there is no distinction between literal and mythical realities; the “reactive,” stage in which the literal status of the old myths has become problematic but doubts on this score are suppressed; and the mature, “symbolic” phase in which the myths are taken as symbols, or “broken myths,” which have lost their literal status but which are nevertheless understood to point towards the experience of the unconditional.<sup>107</sup>

Freud's protest against the father-image offered the occasion for what Tillich called a “new valuation of the religious symbol.” If the “Protestant principal” was the critique of symbols that had become demonically distorted by claiming exclusive validity for themselves, then the corresponding “Catholic substance” was the equally important obligation to create and to use religious symbols in the first place. And here, too, the psychology of the unconscious had helped Christian theology in the Protestant line to recover its own historic, pre-Reformation resources. “The Protestant emphasis on preaching, united with the humanist emphasis on teaching,” Tillich charged, “emptied and reduced the realm of symbolic expressions.”<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> See Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 56-62.

<sup>108</sup> Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought,” 7-8.

Symbols, Tillich wrote, “are matters which reach into the depths of the unconscious”; a great religious symbol “opens up realities which otherwise are closed and opens up dimensions of the soul which otherwise are also shut off.”<sup>109</sup> Tillich admired Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, which posited a stratum of historically recurring symbols and motifs that arose out of the collective unconscious. He pointed to the liturgical, sacramental, and architectural revivals afoot in ecumenical Protestant churches since the early twentieth century as evidence that attention was finally being paid in Protestant circles to what he called the “the non-verbal channels of grace.” Tillich believed “It is not accidental that the growth of depth psychological consciousness and of the new valuation of liturgy, and religious art occurred in the same decades of our century.”<sup>110</sup> “It is not done for ‘enrichment’ or ‘enjoyment’ – this may be a consequence, yet it is not the intention – but it is done as a ‘means of grace’ in alliance with, not in subordination to, the word.” Indeed, the verbal formulations of classic doctrines were themselves symbolic insofar as they had the potential to open up a response in the listening individual's unconscious depths.<sup>111</sup>

Depth psychology's third, final, and – from Tillich's perspective – most decisive theological contribution was the picture it gave of the human predicament: in bondage to demonic, subterranean powers beyond the ability of the conscious mind to control. Freud's “discovery of the unconscious” – which Tillich preferred to

<sup>109</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Nature of Religious Language,” in *Theology of Culture*, 53-67.

<sup>110</sup> Tillich, “Psychiatry and Theology,” 3.

<sup>111</sup> Tillich, “The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought,” 7-8. On the liturgical revival in American Protestantism, see

call the “rediscovery of the unconscious” – demonstrated with an empirical method what artists, poets, and religious adepts had long known: that the sovereignty of the freely choosing mind is an illusion, that we are in fact the playthings of forces with a seemingly autonomous existence within ourselves, and that, as Tillich put it, “the small light of consciousness rises on a large basis of unconscious drives and images.”<sup>112</sup> Tillich believed that Freud's portrayal of human nature gave implicit aid to the more realistic side of a long-standing debate within Christian theology that went back at least to the fourth-century controversy between Pelagius and Saint Augustine. “Pelagianism” was a humanistic scourge. Against Pelagius's assertion of human freedom to resist sin and to behave correctly, Augustine had asserted that the will itself was compromised. Like Freud, he realized that some patients did not want to get better. This realization was, for Tillich, a red thread that ran through the entire Christian tradition, from Jesus's critique of pharisaical legalism in the Gospels to Saint Paul's statement, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” to Augustine's awareness of the labyrinths of sin and guilt to Luther's idea of the “bondage of the will.” As Tillich stated to a meeting of the Theological Discussion Group in 1956, “Psychotherapy has confirmed and made concrete through an immense amount of material the Augustinian (Paulinian-Lutheran) insight in the dependence of our free acts on motives which in the act itself are not consciously present.”<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Paradox of Prayer,” in *The New Being*, 137; Paul Tillich, “The Rediscovery of the Demonic,” PTP, bMS 649/44 (9).

<sup>113</sup> Tillich, “Psychiatry and Theology,” 3.

One of the great – and also terrible – fruits of the mid-twentieth century's psychoanalytic temper, Tillich thought, was “the difficulty of anyone's being able to hide permanently from himself and from others the motives for his actions.” The analyst's thrusting and often malign-seeming attacks were necessary to bring down the moral pretensions of what Tillich referred to, derisively, as the “men of good will,” especially among the middle and upper classes. “For who amongst us is not full of good will? But perhaps if we come to know ourselves better, we may begin to suspect that some of this good will is not so good after all, and that we are driven by forces of which we might not even be aware.”<sup>114</sup> Beneath the benevolent surface of respectable or commendable behavior lurked reservoirs of unspoken hostility. All motives, indeed, were ambiguous: the “good” in one's actions is often undertaken for selfish or evil reasons, while the “bad” can be the distorted expression of a deeper good. Tillich liked to cite an entire catalogue of cases that illustrated this point from all walks of life: businessmen whose hard work was in fact an attempt to escape from themselves, rebels against society whose non-conformity was really an attempt to gain the respect of a group of professed non-conformists, moral puritans whose apparent self-restraint was in fact a failure to affirm the joy of life, self-styled cynics whose readiness to criticize everyone and everything masked a deeper woundedness and despair. “When a ‘pillar’ of a suburban community, outstanding in moral and social activity, admits having suicidal tendencies, or if the mother of a happy family reveals, voluntarily and involuntarily, hatred against her children –

<sup>114</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Good That I Will, I Do Not,” in *The Eternal Now*, 49.



then a Pelagian interpretation of these situation and any appeal to 'free will' breaks down."<sup>115</sup>

Pelagian moralism and legalism were perhaps especially common in America, where the Calvinistic and Evangelistic traditions had lost or even inverted the classical doctrine of "justification by grace through faith" in favor of a pharisaical notion of good works – in practice if not necessarily in doctrine. And this was as much the case in the so-called "liberal" precincts of Christianity as it was among biblical fundamentalists. Indeed, Tillich's psychoanalytically grounded attack on moralism was of a piece with the critique of liberal, "humanist" theology that he and Niebuhr had advanced at Union – the center of the liberal tradition in America – since the 30s and 40s. Tillich's relationship to theological liberalism, as we have seen, was always ambivalent. As he told a mixed group of clinicians and ministers at the Washington School of Psychiatry in 1955, depth psychology could be an aid to liberal theology if by "liberal" one meant theology "which ask[s] radical questions, and give[s] answers to the situation out of which these radical questions are asked." But it was fatal to liberal theology in the narrower sense of "a special type of theology which has dominated this scene of Protestantism for about one hundred and fifty years." This tradition's central presupposition was that "knowledge and moral appeal will be sufficient to bring man back to his essential goodness" and that "conscious decisions for God – religious decisions as well as moral decisions as well as intellectual decisions – are always, in every human being, possible." The crux of this attitude, according to

<sup>115</sup> Tillich, "The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thinking," 4.

Tillich, was contained in Immanuel Kant's dictum, "You can for you should." It was an attitude modeled on the notion of technological progress that dominated the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century, in which "man is able to go in the direction of better and better according to his rational insight and will."<sup>116</sup>

Freud's rediscovery of the unconscious had helped to break down this humanistic confidence in its most recent iteration. At first in the assessment of pathologies, and then for the more general run of human behavior, the depth psychologists had shown the many situations in which "the compulsory character of many of our actions is obvious" and "the appeal to free will is meaningless." Worse than meaningless: it actively awakens the sleeping resistance of those who sincerely wish to obey moral commands and who would, if they could, but who find that they cannot; "laws and commands do not heal, but increase the sickness of the sick," as he wrote.<sup>117</sup> An alcoholic cannot be exhorted into not drinking if the nature of his sickness is that he cannot control his behavior. In such a circumstance, "the only thing the helper can do is to mobilize the healing powers, the forces of grace which are still working in the counselee and which may be strengthened by the way in which the counselor accepts him without moral demands."<sup>118</sup> This insight did not negate moral responsibility, the existence of the will as one function among others in the human personality, or even the necessity of laws and rules. But what it did do was to "limit the margin of human freedom drastically" and, in cases of genuine sickness, to place the sick person's hope for salvation not in the strenuousness of his

<sup>116</sup> Tillich, "Psychoanalysis and Christianity," 1, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Paul Tillich, "Heal the Sick; Cast Out the Demons," in *The Eternal Now*, 63.

<sup>118</sup> Tillich, "The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thinking," 4

will but rather in the healing power from without: “Those who are in chains cannot liberate themselves, and those who are sick cannot heal themselves. All liberating, all healing power comes from the other side of the wall which separates us from eternal life.”<sup>119</sup> As Tillich later said in a dialogue with Carl Rogers, “you cannot forgive yourself, you cannot accept yourself. If you look in the spiritual mirror, then you are much more prone to hate yourself, to be disgusted with yourself.” This impossibility of self-forgiveness was why the person-to-person experience of acceptance – whether by the therapist, the confessor, the friend, or the lover – was necessary for healing to occur.

But acceptance was not the same thing as permissiveness. Unlike many ecumenical Protestants, Tillich did not think that the “good news” of forgiveness merited the deletion of the word “sin” from the Christian lexicon – despite the understandable temptation to get rid of it – but rather its radical reinterpretation along non-moralistic lines. For “there is a mysterious fact about the great words of our religious tradition,” he wrote: “they cannot be replaced.”<sup>120</sup> The “poor, petty, distorted image” of sin that had long prevailed in moralistic Protestant circles – as a “failure to act in the right way, a failure to do the good one should have and could have done” – needed to be discarded, to be sure. But there was no escaping Sin, in the singular and with a capital S, which was “the great, all-pervading problem of our life.” For absent an understanding of the deeper meaning of Sin it was impossible to understand the central Christian paradox of forgiveness and grace, or acceptance.

<sup>119</sup> Tillich, “Psychoanalysis and Christianity,” 4; Tillich, “Salvation,” in *The Eternal Now*, 115.

<sup>120</sup> Paul Tillich, “You Are Accepted,” in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 154.

“The first step to an understanding of the Christian message that is called ‘good news’ is to dispel the image of sin that implies a catalogue of sins,” Tillich wrote in his sermon, “The Good That I Will, I Do Not”:

Those who are bound to this image are also those who find it most difficult to receive the message of acceptance of the unacceptable. Their half-sinfulness and half-righteousness makes them insensitive to a message that states the presence of total sinfulness and total righteousness in the same man at the same moment. They never find the courage to make a total judgment against themselves, and therefore, they can never find the courage to believe in a total acceptance of themselves.<sup>121</sup>

By clinging to illusions of moral self-command and rational willpower, the “men of good will” blinded themselves to their own guilt and to their own great need of acceptance and healing. Psychotherapy’s hostile service to the Christian churches was in breaking down the clean distinctions between the “sinners” and the “righteous,” in order to show the “righteous” what they truly are.

In his most famous sermon, “You Are Accepted,” Tillich offered what he claimed was “not a substitute” but rather “a useful clue in the interpretation of the word ‘sin’: ‘separation’.” Sin is separation from other people, from oneself, and from the ground of all being. It is the state of tragic and universal estrangement from that to which we essentially belong, an experience of being split, divided, torn asunder, unable to account for our own behavior and actions.

Such separation is prepared in the mother’s womb, and before that time, in every preceding generation. It is manifest in the special actions of our conscious life. It reaches beyond our graves into all the succeeding generations. It is our existence itself. *Existence is separation!* Before sin is an act, it is a state.

<sup>121</sup> Tillich, “The Good That I Will, I Do Not,” in *The Eternal Now*, 52.

For theology, the discovery of this truth implied not an innovation but rather a ressourcement. Over the centuries the word “sin” had “received distorting connotations” and had been so misunderstood by ministers and laypeople that in order to recover its original meaning it was necessary to “look outside our churches and their average preaching to the artists and writers and ask *them*.” And also to the psychotherapists, he might easily have added. Tillich pointed to the title of psychoanalyst Karl Menninger’s classic book on suicide, *Man Against Himself* (1938), as an indication of “the rediscovery of an age-old insight,” that “man is split within himself.” “Our generation knows more than the generation of our fathers about the profusive aggressiveness in every being,” Tillich told his listeners. “Are we not almost always ready to abuse everybody and everything, although often in a very refined way,” he asked, “for the pleasure of self-elevation, for an occasion for boasting, for a moment of lust? To know that we are ready is to know the meaning of the separation of life from life, and of ‘sin abounding.’”<sup>122</sup>

It was only the paradoxical acceptance of this situation – in its full negativity – that constituted the way to healing, reunion, grace, love. For it was only by seeing and accepting the state of estrangement that humans can also see that from which they are estranged: the unity and abundance of life. “Health,” Tillich told a graduating class seminarians in 1955, “is not the lack of divergent trends in our bodily or mental or spiritual life, but the power to keep them united. And healing is the act of reuniting them after the disruption of their unity.” This was the true vocation of the minister: not to prevent sickness but to heal it. Tillich saw, in many

<sup>122</sup> Tillich, “You Are Accepted,” in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 154-5, 157.

American Protestant churches, a “sick desire to escape sickness by cutting off what can produce sickness.” This desire was futile because we are all sick: “A church that has ceased to risk sickness and even demonic influences has little power to heal and to cast out demons.” He asked the graduating class, “in this solemn hour,” whether they were indeed capable of representing the Christian message: “Should you ask me—can we heal without being healed ourselves?—I would answer—you can! For neither the disciples nor you could ever say—we are healed, so let us heal others. He who would believe this of himself is least fit to heal others; for he would be separating himself from them. Show them whom you counsel that their predicament is also your predicament.”<sup>123</sup>

These words, spoken in 1955, were some of Tillich’s last as a professor at Union Theological Seminary. Later that year, he retired from Union and took up a prestigious University Professorship at Harvard, a post offered to him by the University’s new president, Nathan Pusey, then in the process of softening the more technocratic agenda of his predecessor, James Conant. This shift in Tillich’s professional position corresponded to a paradoxical shift of emphasis in his thought. Tillich often said he felt it was his role to bring faith to the doubting, and doubt to the faithful; perhaps unsurprisingly, then, his public message became more theological at the moment his surroundings were becoming more secular. Without severing his ties to the liberal Protestant establishment and without altering the system of his thought very much, Tillich began to make his home more confidently

<sup>123</sup> Tillich, “Heal the Sick; Cast Out the Demons,” in *The Eternal Now*, 64.

among the secular intelligentsia. He became less involved in church politics and intra-Protestant debates and correspondingly more active on the college lecture circuit, in media appearances, and on academic panels and colloquia.<sup>124</sup> But as he did so, he turned his attention increasingly toward critiquing the presuppositions of all manner of secular philosophies and worldviews, the most influential of which was psychoanalysis itself. It is toward such critiques that the next chapter is directed. If the years at Union, to which his 1955 commencement address served as a kind of capstone, were in some sense those of a “church theologian,” speaking from “inside the theological circle,” then the later part of his career marked his full emergence as what he had aspired to be ever since the end of World War I, a “theologian of culture.”<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> When a colleague asked Tillich, a few months after he started his new job at Harvard, how he was liking it, his response recalled his earlier career at various German universities: “Very much; at last I am back in a *university*.” See Harvey Cox, introduction to *The Courage to Be*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), xii.

<sup>125</sup> On this turn in Tillich’s career, see Durwood Foster, “Merging Two Masters: Tillich’s Culminating Years at Union,” Banquet Address to the North American Paul Tillich Society, *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*, <http://www.napts.org/assets/banquet10/Foster2010.pdf>, 3. On the

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MEANING OF ANXIETY: *THE COURAGE TO BE* AND TILlich'S DIALOGUE WITH PSYCHOANALYSIS

If the foregoing chapter rehearsed Tillich's attempt on behalf of midcentury Protestant theology to receive what he called the "constructive criticism" of psychoanalysis, the current chapter will perform the opposite procedure, showing the ways in which he made this dialogue a two-way street, offering theological and philosophical critiques of psychoanalysis on the level of its underlying presuppositions. Using Tillich's most popular and famous book – *The Courage to Be* – as a prism, I will situate the distinctive position that he marked out for himself among several of the most influential psychotherapeutic schools of the 1940s and 1950s. In the course of adjudicating these exchanges, I aim to elaborate more fully Tillich's theory of personality and to elucidate his reply to the secular theories of the self that dominated his milieu. *The Courage to Be* absorbed psychotherapy's many brilliant insights about the concrete workings of anxiety and the inner conflicts that gave rise to it, yet subordinated these insights to an ontological framework that recognized anxiety as an ineradicable feature of human existence.

#### **The Problem of Anxiety and Its Answer**

"You must know *everything* about anxiety," Tillich admonished his doctoral advisee Rollo May, whose dissertation in clinical psychiatry at Columbia would be published within several years as *The Meaning of Anxiety* (1950). "Everything ever written, thought, every research up to this day." The year was 1946. May, who had



known Tillich for over a decade, had recently recovered from an eighteen-month stay at a sanatorium in the Adirondacks after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, a time that had given the younger man ample opportunity to reflect on his teacher and the various ordeals *he* had faced in recent decades: World War I, the failure of his first marriage, his confrontation with the Nazis, his exile and emigration. When May was beset by negative feelings in his sickbed at Saranac Lake – “resentment against life for visiting me with the sinister bacilli, my feeling of morbid self-pity that I had had such a hard time of it,” as he later wrote – he had thought of Tillich and of how he had met the challenges of his life with courage and creativity; doing so laid May’s feelings bare as “the superficial complaints they were.” He had realized that “no one can directly and successfully combat his destiny, but each of us, by virtue of the small margin of freedom that prevails even in a sanatorium bed, can choose his attitude toward that destiny.”<sup>1</sup> In time, May became Tillich’s most eminent student, a founder of the so-called “third force” psychology that was attempting to navigate between psychoanalysis and behaviorism and author of numerous bestselling books such as *Love and Will* (1969) and *The Courage to Create* (1975). As the title of the latter book, with its echo of *The Courage to Be*, implies, May always credited Tillich as one of his leading influences.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> May, *Paulus*, 21, 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> The first son of a family with six children, May had grown up in the Midwest. His involvement with a radical student magazine got him expelled from the University of Michigan; for a time in his twenties he traveled around Europe and studied with the Viennese psychoanalyst Alfred Adler. Upon returning to the States, he decided to go into the ministry and enrolled at Union Theological Seminary where he had met Tillich in 1934, only a few months after the latter’s arrival from Germany. May later described his first impression of Tillich, whom he encountered wandering lost and bewildered down a corridor: “A large leonine head with a shock of bushy hair over a high forehead. High color, and a face constructed not in curves but in planes, like a portrait by Cezanne.” The two men struck up a friendship when, after observing Tillich’s discomfiture when students laughed at his lecture hall mispronunciations and malapropisms, May

But in the 1940s he was just a graduate student, studying under a charismatic but still relatively obscure theologian. Tillich, who did not serve on dissertation committees very often but took the responsibility seriously when he did, was committed to upholding the strict and exhaustive standards of German scholarship, especially for his more promising students such as May. Tillich believed that by knowing a subject in its wholeness – even and especially a subject as large as “anxiety” – a scholar gave himself a foundation and a center upon which to draw throughout his career. The brilliant, headstrong, thirty-year-old May, who had already written and published a first book before undertaking his PhD, remonstrated with his *doktorvater*, arguing that no one had ever known everything about anything and accusing Tillich of “expecting an impossible perfection, or of expressing his own sadism with me as the victim.” Tillich gave a slight smile at this therapist’s gambit but insisted firmly that May must master his daunting yet unquestionably topical subject.<sup>3</sup>

As May toiled away at his dissertation under Tillich’s supervision in the late 40s, anxiety was becoming a – perhaps *the* – central problem and preoccupation of many American intellectuals. “The Age of Anxiety”: commentators found in the title of W.H. Auden’s long poem of 1947 an apt label for their era, in spite of the fact that relatively few actually took the time to read its tragic-comic account of four people attempting to drink away their existential despair in a wartime New York City bar.<sup>4</sup>

sent him a note reassuring him that although the students’ laughter may have been at him, it was not *against* him. The gesture meant a great deal to Tillich. See May, *Paulus*, 1, 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> May, *Paulus*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*, ed. Alan Jacobs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Tillich’s thought was on Auden’s mind at the time he wrote *The Age of Anxiety*; his wartime return to the Anglican Church was accompanied by readings of Tillich and Kierkegaard. Auden’s returning

“It has become almost a truism,” as Tillich observed a few years later, “to call our time an ‘age of anxiety.’”<sup>5</sup> Certainly, there were many obvious inducements to anxiety after the end of the war: the possible renewal of geopolitical hostilities, the world-destroying capacities of atomic weaponry, the seeming fragility of economic affluence, the emptiness of the burgeoning consumer culture. These were outward sources of “anxiety” that intellectuals shared with almost everyone else. Left liberal intellectuals also faced special vulnerabilities associated with the climate of political fear symbolized by Senator Joseph McCarthy.<sup>6</sup>

According to May, the birth of the atomic bomb had marked the moment when anxiety went from being a “covert problem” – implicit in a great deal of early-twentieth-century literature and art – to an “overt problem,” “an urgent issue which we must at all costs try to define and clarify.” After Hiroshima, the “alert citizens” of the postwar era “were then aware not only of the more obvious anxiety-creating situations such as uncontrolled atomic warfare, radical political and economic upheaval, but also the less obvious, deeper, and more personal sources of anxiety in themselves and their fellow-men.”<sup>7</sup> As Tillich was fond of pointing out, one of the

theological preoccupations and some of his religious vocabulary also owe something to Tillich: he refers, at one point in *The Age of Anxiety*, to God as our “Ground and goal,” which echoes Tillich’s frequent descriptions of God as our “Ground and aim.” Yet the formulation also seems to have made Auden uncomfortable: “I can see ... what leads Tillich to speak of God as ‘Ground of Being,’ but if I try to pray: ‘O Thou Ground, have mercy upon us,’ I start to giggle.” See Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 34.

<sup>6</sup> For synoptic interpretations of the postwar era as an “Age of Anxiety,” see William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1990) and Warren Susman, “Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Larry May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 19–37. For the resonance of the term “anxiety” specifically, see Louis Menand, “Freud, Anxiety, and the Cold War” in *After Freud Left*, 189–207.

<sup>7</sup> Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (1950), 3–4. George Cotkin and Louis Menand both suggest that May secularized and psychologized Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety in *The Meaning of Anxiety*, making it the object of medical healing and moralistic exhortation rather than religious awe. While it is true that May’s

defining characteristics of anxiety was exactly its *lack* of a definite object. Unlike fear, which has a specific focus that can be isolated and confronted, anxiety was diffuse, generalized, even ontological. At any rate, it had this character for the many intellectuals who discerned a postwar “age of anxiety.” Anxiety was not merely an emotional state or a response to postwar uncertainty, but rather a problem that reached down into the depths of human personality, and with them into the causes of political disturbance, social upheaval, mental illness, and interpersonal and intrafamilial strife.<sup>8</sup> With Freud, many postwar intellectuals saw anxiety as “a nodal point at which the most various and important questions converge, a riddle whose solution would be bound to throw a flood of light on our whole mental existence.”<sup>9</sup> Or, following Kierkegaard, they affirmed that “he who has learned rightly to be anxious has learned the most important thing.” Not that many claimed to have learned rightly to be anxious. Among existentialists, anxiety was generally a cause for more anxiety.

May used the two above quotations – from Freud and Kierkegaard – as epigraphs for *The Meaning of Anxiety*. Under Tillich’s tutelage, that book became a deft and wide-ranging survey of theories of anxiety in philosophy, medicine, psychology, and psychotherapy. Freud and Kierkegaard were the book’s two presiding spirits: immensely influential figures after the war and progenitors, respectively, of the psychoanalytic and the existentialist perspectives on anxiety

tone occasionally veers toward the hortatory and the uplifting, both historians give short shrift to May’s Protestantism or Tillich’s influence upon him. See George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 64-67 and Menand, “Freud, Anxiety, and the Cold War,” 198-9.

<sup>8</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 31-34.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1966), 488.

then in the process of being synthesized and adjudicated amid the ferment of postwar inwardness. While Freud stressed anxiety as a result of unresolved – and possibly unresolvable – inner conflicts, Kierkegaard defined anxiety as the “dizziness of freedom,” the necessary accompaniment of man’s nakedness before an unapproachable God.<sup>10</sup> Yet if anxiety was a universal phenomenon, its dilemmas and possible resolution pointing in the direction of ultimate things, it did not follow that it was ahistorical. On the contrary: the postwar era was seen as more anxious than other epochs due not only to the bomb but also to the split between mind and body that had been widening in western civilization since the seventeenth century, the victory of technological reason over sensuous depths. *The Meaning of Anxiety* was very much in the genre of what Mark Grief has called “crisis of man” books, in which erudite analysts rehearse the whole of western history, thought, and civilization – with a prominent and usually villainous role for the Enlightenment – to explain their sense of postwar malaise.<sup>11</sup>

Tillich frequently expressed pride in May’s dissertation. According to May, he even told a few people that his own book on anxiety, *The Courage to Be*, was written as an answer to *The Meaning of Anxiety*. Whether or not this was strictly true, May’s

<sup>10</sup> For Freud’s classic statement on anxiety, see *The Problem of Anxiety*, trans. Henry Alden Bunker (New York: Norton, 1936). For Kierkegaard’s, see *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Some historians have criticized postwar intellectuals’ preoccupation with anxiety by claiming that the psychoanalytic and existentialist concepts of anxiety were incompatible both with one another and with subsequent findings about the effects of psychoactive medications. If taking a pill can relieve anxiety, according to this way of thinking, then the search for its larger “meaning” is pointless. Tillich’s work, however, is a rebuff to this entire line of argument: it presents a convincing synthesis between existentialist and psychoanalytic concepts of anxiety while also relating both to the biological and physiological dimensions of being. See Louis Menand, “The Prisoner of Stress,” *New Yorker*, January 27, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 171-191. See Grief, *Age of the Crisis of Man*, 47-60.

book clearly influenced and anticipated some of the categories and arguments of *The Courage to Be*. While Tillich's explicit subject in that book was "courage" – "a concept in which theological, sociological, and philosophical problems converge," as the book's first sentence stated – his central problem was in fact anxiety. Anxiety is the underside of *The Courage to Be*, the core human dilemma to which Tillich proposed "courage" as the answer, courage being that which "conquers" anxiety by taking anxiety "upon oneself." Tillich devoted an entire early section of the book to what he called an "ontology of anxiety": "it is necessary for an ontology of courage to include an ontology of anxiety," he wrote, "for they are interdependent."<sup>12</sup> May also claimed that in the course of their many conversations about May's dissertation, he and Tillich jointly worked out the concept of "normal" – as opposed to "neurotic" – anxiety. (On this distinction, more anon.)<sup>13</sup>

*The Courage to Be* was Tillich's popular masterpiece, the book that brought him his largest readership, that solidified his reputation as an existentialist philosopher, and that resonated to the greatest extent among psychologists, psychotherapists, and all manner of other intellectuals, as well as a generation of earnest, bookish undergraduates. Like almost all of Tillich's writings, *The Courage to Be* reflected his commitment to dialogue across the religious-secular divide. Yet

<sup>12</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 3, 34.

<sup>13</sup> In any collaboration that occurred between the two men, however, Tillich was almost certainly the senior partner. By May's own admission, Tillich's role as thesis adviser was to read May's "chapters bursting with arrogant generalizations (not untypical of PhD candidates)" and to "calmly point out my errors of detail." Especially in the early philosophical and historical sections of *The Meaning of Anxiety*, May cites Tillich reverently and often. And while Tillich could be occasionally careless about citations – wary of overburdening his texts with footnotes – he usually gave credit where it was due when it came to major concepts; nowhere in Tillich's many references to "existential anxiety" or "basic anxiety" does May's name appear. What does seem probable, however, is that May's dissertation placed the problem before Tillich in a sustained way and forced him to refine his own thinking on the subject. See May, *Paulus*, 21-2.

Tillich here focused less on mining psychology for its theological relevance than on engaging and critiquing the presuppositions behind secular understandings of the self. It was not Tillich's intention merely to graft psychotherapeutic insights onto a Christian theological framework. His thought aimed always at describing and effecting the interpenetration of the realms – in this case, of religion and therapy. If the Freudian revolution had helped theology to recover forgotten truths about human nature, then theology, and especially philosophical ontology, also had a critical role to play vis-à-vis psychoanalysis, secular culture's most powerful method for exploring the depths of personality.

Tillich originally wrote *The Courage to Be* in 1950 as the Terry Lectures at Yale University, to be concerned with "religion in the light of science and philosophy." At the time, he had recently marked a major professional milestone and was still reeling from a devastating personal shock. The milestone was the publication of the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, an accomplishment over thirty years in the making. The shock was the recent death, from cancer, of his longtime mistress (and former secretary), Hilde Fränkl. The two events were in fact poignantly linked for Tillich, as Fränkl – the first of Tillich's secretaries to show a close familiarity with his thought – had typed and edited the drafts of the *Systematic Theology*. "What meaning it would have had for Hilde!" Tillich exclaimed in a letter to Hannah Arendt, a close confidante of both Tillich's and Fränkl's.<sup>14</sup> Tillich's own feelings about the *Systematic Theology* were more ambivalent; he told Arendt that

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich to Hannah Arendt, July 24, 1950, in Alf Christophersen and Sclaudia Schulze, "Hannah Arendt – Paul Tillich. Briefwechsel," *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologieggeschichte (Journal for the History of Modern Theology)* 9, no. 1 (May 2002): 139.

the publication meant little to him because he had to begin work immediately on the Terry Lectures and because he was burdened by a sense of the work's inferiority. His grief and his ambition for the new work combined to make his time in New Haven in the spring of 1950 "rich in work, rich in flowers, and also slowly, humanly rich," as he told Arendt.<sup>15</sup>

Tillich always regarded *The Courage to Be* as one of his best works, and often recommended it to those seeking an introduction to his thought. After the book made its way to publication in 1952, several reviewers noted its denseness and difficulty, especially that of the opening chapter: an erudite linguistic history of the term "courage," or *thymós*, as it had developed in the western philosophical canon beginning with Plato and continuing down through the Stoics, Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, and Nietzsche.<sup>16</sup> These complaints prompted Tillich to re-read the book, something he rarely did with his own published writings. When he did so, he felt reassured. "I do not understand why people say *The Courage to Be* is a difficult book," he reflected to a friend. "I just finished reading it, and it reads like a novel."<sup>17</sup> Does *The Courage to Be* truly read like a novel? No. Yet it's clear what Tillich means. Once a reader accepts his basic categories and terms, the book has a propulsive force and fascination capable of drawing even confused readers onward and inward. Its progress, moreover, is genuinely dramatic: from the philological tour of "courage" through the byways of western philosophy to the elaboration of an

<sup>15</sup> Tillich to Arendt, July 24, 1950, in Christophersen and Schulze, "Hannah Arendt – Paul Tillich. Briefwechsel," 139.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 5-30.

<sup>17</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 226.



ontology of anxiety to the pursuit of different remedies for anxiety – neurotic, collectivist, individualistic – to the transcendence of all these strategies in the experience of “absolute faith” and finally to the book’s paradoxical and chiliastic closing sentence. “*The courage to be is rooted in the God that appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.*”<sup>18</sup>

Not like a novel, but perhaps like an intellectual autobiography. Another, more personal reason why Tillich may have found his own book such a gripping read is that it contains and expresses, in highly compacted and sometimes even laconic form, a number of his longest-standing arguments with representatives of psychological thinking and psychotherapeutic insight. Although Tillich’s prose reads smoothly and with a kind of intellectual athleticism, *The Courage to Be* is in fact chock-full of understated references to conversations that Tillich shared with friends and colleagues over the years. From Erich Fromm to Erik Erikson, from Tillich’s friend and possible lover Karen Horney to his student Rollo May, from Frankfurt School pessimists to meliorist neo-Freudian liberals, from humanistic champions of “growth” to Gestalt theorists of “wholeness”: Tillich had a wide and varied acquaintance with the psychotherapeutic movement and profession, traces of which are visible in the pages of *The Courage to Be* for those who know where to look for them. The following section offers a reading of *The Courage to Be* through the lens of these engagements, some of which extend back years or even decades prior to 1950 when Tillich wrote the book.

<sup>18</sup> Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 175.

## Profiles in *Courage*

Tillich begins *The Courage to Be* with a plea for considering his subject, courage, as an ontological as well as an ethical concept: "Courage is an ethical reality, but it is rooted in the whole breadth of human existence and ultimately in the structure of being itself." The universal, ontological implications of "courage" are evident, he says, in one of the earliest philosophical treatments of courage, Plato's *Laches*. In that dialogue, Socrates pokes holes in the conventional idea of courage as one virtue among others. If courage is knowledge of "what is to be dreaded and what dared," as Nikias states, then in order to define courage one must have "a knowledge concerning all goods and all evils under all circumstances." Like many a Platonic dialogue, the *Laches* ends in an impasse, with all the participants admitting that they have no idea what courage is. "But this Socratic failure," writes Tillich, "is more important than most of the seemingly successful definitions of courage," for "[i]t shows that an understanding of courage presupposes an understanding of man and of his world, its structures and values. Only he who knows this knows what to affirm and what to negate."<sup>19</sup>

Despite being aware "there is no chance that I shall succeed where Socrates failed" (4), Tillich nevertheless does attempt his own definition of courage: "The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements which conflict with his essential self-affirmation" (31). This definition leads Tillich to a consideration of those negativities, those elements "in spite of

<sup>19</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 3-4. All parenthetical citations in the following section are to *The Courage to Be*.

which” the self must affirm its essential being through courage. The second chapter of *The Courage to Be*, “Being, Nonbeing, and Anxiety,” takes up “that which tends to prevent the self from affirming itself”: namely, non-being. Anxiety, for Tillich, is the awareness of non-being and especially of one’s own possible non-being. Anxiety is the awareness of finitude, or, put another way, of the possibility of non-being: “It is not the realization of universal transitoriness, not even the experience of the death of others, but the impression of these events on the always latent awareness of our own having to die that produces anxiety” (34).

Anxiety that has a particular focus or object may more properly be defined as fear, since the object of anxiety is always non-being, and non-being is the negation of all particular objects. Anxiety and fear, however, are interdependent: “the sting of fear is anxiety, and anxiety strives toward fear” (36). Behind every concrete fear lies the anxiety of ultimate non-being.<sup>20</sup> In his famous “ontology of anxiety,” Tillich identifies three main forms of “existential anxiety,” the kind of anxiety that belongs to the structure of being as such rather than to particular, contingent situations. These are: the anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of guilt and condemnation, and the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness. Each of these forms of anxiety takes a relative and an absolute form. The relative anxiety of fate – the vicissitudes of life

<sup>20</sup> Tillich’s thinking was parallel on this point, as on many others, with that of his friend the neurologist and Gestalt theorist Kurt Goldstein, who wrote in 1939: “The basis of fear is the threat of the onset of anxiety. As manifold as states of anxiety may be . . . they all have one common denominator: The experience of danger, of peril for one’s self. . . . In the state of fear, we have an object in front of us which we can ‘meet,’ which we can attempt to remove, or from which we can flee. We are conscious of ourselves, as the object, we can deliberate how we shall behave toward it, and we can look at the cause of the fear which actually lies spatially before us. On the other hand, anxiety attacks us from the rear, so to speak. The only thing we can do is attempt to flee from it without knowing where to go, because we experience it as coming from no particular place. This flight is sometimes successful, though merely by chance, and usually fails: anxiety remains with us.” Quoted in Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 255.

and the inevitability of suffering – points toward the anxiety of death, extinction, the absolute end. The relative anxiety of guilt – the sense that one’s life was not lived as it ought to be, that one’s potentialities are unused or misused – points toward the absolute anxiety of being condemned, lost, forgotten in eternity. Behind the anxiety of emptiness – the doubt about specific beliefs, purposes, or meanings – is the anxiety of meaninglessness, or the breakdown of all meanings. All three forms of existential anxiety are present in the experience of despair, in which non-being is felt as absolutely triumphant and yet also inescapable, even by open or hidden suicide. All of human life, says Tillich, can be understood as an attempt – an intermittently successful one – to avoid the extreme situation of despair (34-53).<sup>21</sup>

Thus far, Tillich’s treatment of anxiety and courage stands chiefly on philosophical rather than psychological grounds; his analysis owes a significant and obvious debt to those existentialist “ontologists,” especially Heidegger but also Kierkegaard, who aimed to elucidate the basic structures of “Being” and “Being-in-the-world.” In the famous phrase of Heidegger, whom Tillich knew from his Marburg days and whose writings he and Hannah Arendt made efforts to have translated into English: “*That about which one has anxiety is being-in-the-world as such.*”<sup>22</sup> This foundation is crucial to understanding Tillich’s posture towards the different schools of psychotherapy, but it belongs to a level more abstract and more

<sup>21</sup> This aspect of Tillich’s thought was extremely influential upon the anthropologist Ernest Becker. See Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973). See Becker’s letter of praise to Tillich in the Tillich archive, Ernest Becker to Paul Tillich, October 11, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/123.

<sup>22</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 180. For a robust and, in my view, somewhat overstated case for Tillich’s dependence on Heideggerian ontology in *The Courage to Be*, see Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99-109.

basic than that confronted by most working therapists, faced as they are with the concrete problems of their patients. Tillich acknowledges as much in the third chapter of *The Courage to Be*, “Pathological Anxiety, Vitality, and Courage,” in which he turns his attention to “non-existential anxiety,” the kind of anxiety that is the result of “contingent occurrences in human life.” Unlike existential anxiety, which is baked into the basic human experience, “non-existential anxiety” – whether in its neurotic or pathological forms – is amenable to psychotherapeutic healing and even cure. It is a “preliminary” form of anxiety that, with the right kind of human attention, can be resolved into what truly lies behind it, namely existential anxiety (59).

Tillich’s conceptual clarity here has had paradoxically confusing consequences. Some interpreters have taken him here to be pressing for a sharp distinction between the two kinds of anxiety, existential and non-existential, together with a strict division of labor between psychotherapists, on the one hand, who address themselves to neurotic and pathological, “non-existential” forms of anxiety, and ministers on the other hand, who see to anxiety in its more basic, ontological, “existential” manifestations.<sup>23</sup> Tillich’s project is thus depicted as a stern demarcation of professional boundaries between priests and ministers, when in fact he was trying to recognize these boundaries in order to transcend them. In his actual treatment of the problem in *The Courage to Be*, Tillich stresses that non-existential anxiety stems from existential anxiety; in fact it *is* existential anxiety,

<sup>23</sup> See John Dourley, “Tillich in Dialogue with Psychology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238-253.

“under special conditions.” Neurotic and pathological forms of anxiety are indeed the professional province of medicine. And ministers *as ministers* should certainly not go out of their way to be doctors, nor doctors *as doctors* to be ministers. But “neither the medical nor the priestly function is bound to its vocational representatives: the minister may be a healer and the psychotherapist a priest, and each human being may be both in relation to the ‘neighbor’” (71). The ministerial function, Tillich writes, “comprehends both itself and the medical function.” Medicine and theology are separate “faculties” devoted the same ultimate aim: reunification, healing, self-affirmation in the largest possible sense (61). Tillich expresses regret that the healing function – physical, mental, spiritual – has become split in the course of western history among medical doctors, psychologists, and ministers, in contrast to the unification of these roles found in ancient Greek *physis*, in the biblical healing narratives, or in primitive shamanism.

The aim of the therapist, whether medical or priestly, should be to assist the individual in recognizing his neurotic or pathological anxiety as preliminary to the anxiety that has no cure but that can only be accepted, “taken into oneself” by a transcendent courage to be. Neurotic and pathological anxieties are strategies of escape from existential anxiety; they help to preserve an ersatz sense of self that keeps existential anxiety, i.e. real anxiety, at bay. The neurotic, for example, avoids the “extreme situation of despair” by “escaping into neurosis,” a limited, fixed, and unrealistic sense of self:

He still affirms himself but on a limited scale. *Neurosis is the way of avoiding nonbeing by avoiding being.* In the neurotic state self-affirmation is not lacking; it can indeed be very strong and emphasized. But the self which is affirmed is a reduced one. Some or many of its potentialities are not admitted

to actualization, because actualization of being implies the acceptance of nonbeing and its anxiety (61).

Tillich notes that this strategy is “not without some instinctive wisdom.” If the neurotic were to acknowledge his finitude realistically, he would be left exposed to his authentic anxiety and could easily fall into despair or else back onto another, even better defended neurosis. As it is, however, his “weak, reduced self-affirmation” is “the castle to which he has retired and which he defends with all means of psychological resistance against attack, be it from the side of reality or from the side of the analyst” (63).

Here Tillich’s debts to, as well as his departures from, his contemporaries in the psychological professions begin to come into view. On the one hand, Tillich’s description of neurosis sounds a good bit like the one given by his good friend, the neo-Freudian analyst and author Karen Horney, in *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937). Horney’s influential portrait of the neurotic personality depicts a series of doomed strategies to escape or fend off what she calls “basic anxiety.” These tendencies – including masochism, affection-seeking, and false guilt – “all have a common basis in an emphasis on the determining role that anxiety plays in bringing about neurotic character trends.” Neurotics, who for Horney were representative of an increasingly common “character structure” in American society, create imaginary worlds in order to protect themselves from awareness of inner conflicts, wishes, hostilities, and anxieties.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1937), ix.

On the other hand, Tillich took issue with Horney's idea of basic anxiety, which was quite different from his own. For Horney, "basic anxiety" meant the feeling of being unloved or unlovable that resulted from damaging childhood experiences and especially from parental disregard. For Tillich, the term "basic" should be reserved for what was truly basic, the structures of being and existence itself. "Basic anxiety" was thus, for him, equivalent to "existential anxiety" or "ontological anxiety." "A search for the basic anxiety," he writes in a passage from *The Courage to Be* obviously aimed at Horney, "is made by practical and theoretical analysts. But in most of these attempts a criterion of what is basic and what is derived seems to be lacking." Psychotherapeutic theories of anxiety, he claims, are "in a confused state in spite of all [their] brilliant insights" (60). Only an ontological framework – one that understands anxiety in terms of the encounter with non-being – can look past the numerous and varying manifestations of anxiety found among individuals and groups to discover their underlying unity.

Tillich illustrated his interpretation of neurotic anxiety by examining the neurotic counterparts of each of the three main forms of existential anxiety he had identified: the anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of guilt and condemnation, and the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness. Neurotic anxiety about fate and death "impels toward a security which is comparable to the security of a prison." It produces unrealistic fears while ignoring genuine threats: "one avoids particular dangers, although they are hardly real, and suppresses the awareness of having to die although this is an ever-present reality" (69). In neurotic anxiety about guilt and condemnation, the neurotic represses real guilt – from neglecting one's



potentialities and losing one's destiny – and reproaches himself with “pseudo-guilt” or else withdraws from life in order to minimize decisions and actions which could possibly produce guilt. The neurotic anxiety over emptiness and meaninglessness takes the form of a strained certitude and fanatical allegiance to extrinsic authorities and systems of meaning in which, deep down, one does not actually believe. It was on the basis of such neuroses, increasingly prevalent in the twentieth century, that authoritarian movements – of the Right and the Left – drew their power.

Neurotics, notoriously, have low vitality. Tillich believed this was the case due to the intimate connection between vitality, courage, and anxiety. “Anxiety and courage have a psychosomatic character,” he wrote. “They are biological as well as psychological” (72). A vital life process shows a proper balance between fear and courage, responding to genuine (not imaginary) threats to its self-affirmation but also, for the sake of that self-affirmation, risking possible pain or even annihilation. Awareness of the biological – and, hence, at least partly deterministic – dimension to courage supplies an important insight in that it prohibits a moralistic valuation: “one cannot command the courage to be and one cannot gain it by obeying a command. Religiously speaking, it is a matter of grace” (78). Yet the vitality which Tillich had in mind was a more than merely physical one: “vitality is not something which can be separated from the totality of man's being, his language, his creativity, his spiritual life, his ultimate concern.” The story of the modern West was, in part, the growth of a perfidious dualism dividing human beings into “a bloodless intellect and a meaningless vitality. The middle ground between them, the spiritual soul in which vitality and intentionality are united, was dropped” (76). In nineteenth-

century romanticism and naturalism, a “merely biological vitality” became the ultimate source of courage, thus re-establishing “the barbarian as the ideal of courage” and lending support to the fascist veneration of vitality in the twentieth century (77). But this was a distortion of vitality, for “in man nothing is ‘merely biological’ as nothing is ‘merely spiritual.’ Every cell of his body participates in his freedom and spirituality, and every act of his spiritual creativity is nourished by his vital dynamics” (76).

This holistic aspect of Tillich’s thinking was influenced by classical sources – he cites Aristotle’s doctrine of courage as the right mean between cowardice and temerity, as well as the Greek ideal of *areté*, combining strength and value – but also by his intimate association with Gestalt psychology, especially through his friend and fellow émigré, the German neurologist and psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein. Gestalt, as Anne Harrington has shown, was an entire scientific worldview and a path not taken for the biological sciences after the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> Associated in the popular mind with images of ducks and rabbits, Gestalt theorists were in fact in pursuit of a much more ambitious agenda: a holistic picture of the human organism, integrating biological, psychological, and sociological understandings of humanity. The crucial insight of the Gestalt psychologists, whose research focused on how the brain receives and organizes sensory inputs, was that the human whole is greater than a sum of its parts. Tillich and Goldstein originally met at a conference in Davos, Switzerland 1928, the year before Martin Heidegger and Ernest Cassirer debated the meaning of human finitude and freedom; unlike Heidegger and Cassirer, Tillich

<sup>25</sup> Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*.

and Goldstein remained friends and continued a close exchange over the decades in the United States.<sup>26</sup> It is chiefly of Gestalt that we must think when Tillich writes sentences such as: “Man lives ‘in’ meanings, in that which is valid logically, esthetically, ethically, religiously. His subjectivity is impregnated with objectivity. In every encounter with reality the structures of self and world are interdependently present” (75).

Tillich devoted two chapters of his book to the pursuit of two forms of courage that attempted to meet the problem of anxiety: “the courage to be as a part” and “the courage to be as oneself.” In the former, self-affirmation is attempted through immersive belonging to a larger collectivity and as a means of fending off the terrors of ultimate loneliness and meaninglessness; in the latter, through the strenuous assertion of individual autonomy against the dehumanizing tendencies of the mass. Forms of the former included medieval “collectivism,” modern totalitarian “neo-collectivism,” and postwar American “democratic conformism.” Forms of the latter included existentialist philosophy, modernist literature, and expressionist art. Yet though Tillich is often described as an existentialist, he did not necessarily

<sup>26</sup> See Katja Bruns, *Anthropolgie zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft bei Paul Tillich und Kurt Goldstein: historische Grundlagen und systematische Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2011). Tillich’s student Rollo May and Goldstein’s student Abraham Maslow (with whom Tillich was also close) became two of the founders of the existential – also sometimes called humanistic, or “third force” – psychotherapy. Largely due to this connection, Tillich is sometimes credited as a predecessor of this movement, although Tillich was critical of Maslow’s idea of “peak-experiences,” asking in a letter “what is the relationship of the peak-experiences to ultimate concern?” See Paul Tillich to Abraham Maslow, May 25, 1965, PTP, bMS 649/164. See Roy José DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991) and Jessica Grogan, *Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology, Sixties Culture, and the Shaping of the Modern Self* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013). Somewhat separately, Gestalt was also the titular foundation of its own school of psychotherapy – focused on growth, process, the phenomenology of present experience – that was developed by Fritz and Laura Perls, the latter of whom had been a student of Tillich’s. See Frederick S. Perls, Ralph Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (Gouldsboro, ME: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1951).

elevate the courage to be as oneself over the courage to be as a part. Both, he believed, were forms of courage, each correlated to one another; both were rooted in the basic structure of being. Participation and individualization, world and self, the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself: these were distinguishable but mutually interrelated poles; only under the estranged conditions of existence do they appear as opposites. "A part of a whole is not identical with the whole to which it belongs. But the whole is what it is only with the part," Tillich writes (81). Again, the influence of Gestalt psychology is evident.

Tillich's analysis of "the courage to be as a part" also shows the influence of *Escape from Freedom* (1941), the social-psychological analysis of modern totalitarianism, the Protestant Reformation, and the "authoritarian personality" written by his friend, fellow émigré, and former colleague Erich Fromm. Fromm's project in *Escape from Freedom* was a sweeping history of western modernity via the concept of "freedom," another term which resonates throughout Tillich's thought. Modern European and American history under the aegis of economic and political liberalism, Fromm believed, had been a slow, uneven process of throwing off the strictures of traditional and extrinsic authority:

One tie after another was severed. Man had overthrown the domination of nature and made himself her master; he had overthrown the domination of the Church and the domination of the absolutist state. The *abolition of external domination* seemed to be not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition to attain the cherished goal: the freedom of the individual.<sup>27</sup>

But a paradox was at work: with each new freedom won, man exposed himself to a new anxiety that tempted him to throw away this freedom. If "freedom to" – a

<sup>27</sup> Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt, 1941), 2.

capacity for spontaneous activity and relatedness to others and to the world – did not accompany the achievement of “freedom from,” man would be left exposed to an anxiety that would send him back into even harsher and more exacting forms of bondage. The gap between negative and positive freedom was a dangerous breeding ground for authoritarianism. This paradox showed the close, dialectical interrelation between freedom and authority, or what Tillich would have called “autonomy and heteronomy.”

Cut loose from “primary ties” and unable to face the possibility of meaninglessness implied in their freedom, people would “escape” by submitting themselves to newer, often more total and exacting forms of domination. Man was thus faced with a stark choice: “to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else to seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self.” Part of the frisson of *Escape from Freedom* – and indeed of mass society criticism in this period more generally, Tillich’s included – was that while Fromm spent the better part of the book talking about Naziism and other forms of totalitarianism, much of the subtext applied to the United States.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the individualistic overtone of his work, Tillich’s analysis of “the courage to be as a part” shows his willingness to acknowledge social belonging and collective “we-consciousness” as a potential good, an indispensable element of the larger courage to be, despite the obvious ways he had been personally victimized by its distortions in his own life. The following passage, describing the attempt to

<sup>28</sup> Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 21.

escape anxiety through identification with a collective identity, is saturated with Tillich's own experience with Nazi fanaticism:

Meaning is saved, but the self is sacrificed. And since the conquest of doubt was a matter of sacrifice, the sacrifice of the freedom of the self, it leaves a mark on the regained certitude: a fanatical self-assertiveness. Fanaticism is the correlate to spiritual self-surrender: it shows the anxiety which it was supposed to conquer, by attacking with disproportionate violence those who disagree and who demonstrate by their disagreements elements in the spiritual life of the fanatic which he must suppress in himself. Because he must suppress them in himself he must suppress them in others. His anxiety forces him to persecute dissenters (47).

Yet Tillich also acknowledged that such identifications were inevitable and even sometimes admirable expressions of partial truths. His analysis of American "democratic conformism," for example, shows an ambivalent appreciation for the "American courage" – as well as a tendency towards generalizations about national character that he borrowed from his neo-Freudian friends in the culture-and-personality school of anthropology. For Tillich, the "American courage" was the identification of the individual with the productive process and the progressive movement of history. "The typical American, after he has lost the foundations of his existence, works for new foundations," Tillich writes. "One can make experiments because an experimental failure does not mean discouragement. The productive process in which one is a participant naturally includes risks, failures, catastrophes. But they do not undermine courage" (99). The price of such full identification with the productive process, however, was nearly uncontrollable anxiety in the situation when the individual is excluded from that process, for example the kind of mass unemployment seen during the Great Depression.

In polar contrast to "The Courage to Be as a Part" was "The Courage to Be as

Oneself,” the subject of Tillich’s fifth chapter, on “Courage and Individualization.”

Despite Tillich’s reputation as an existentialist, he was actually quite critical of “pure” existentialism, unbalanced by idealist/essentialist elements, which he saw as the paradigmatic example of individualized courage. For him, the existentialist denial of a human nature – encapsulated by Sartre’s statement that “man’s essence is his existence” – was self-contradictory because even denying human nature was itself a statement about human nature: namely, an attribution of total freedom. Still, Existentialism demonstrated the “courage of despair,” the capacity to affirm oneself in spite of Freud’s historical significance for Tillich was that he “confirmed and methodologically organized” the Existentialist insights of modernist artists and writers, from Baudelaire to Ibsen to Dostoevsky.

The final chapter of *The Courage to Be* is the most original and also the most enigmatic. It identifies a courage that goes above the polarity of individualization or participation, above the split between subject and object, above language, above even the existence or non-existence of God. This originated from what Tillich called the “God above the god of theism”: the ground and source of everything that is, the infinite meaning that lies beyond the destruction of all finite meanings: “the God that appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt” (175). Tillich attempted to describe what he called “absolute faith,” a state of being “grasped by the God beyond God.” This was not a state of mind beside other states of mind – just as the “God above God” was not a being beside other beings – but rather “always a movement in, with , and under other states of the mind. It is the situation on the boundary of man’s possibilities. It *is* this boundary. . . . It is not a place where one

can live, it is without the safety of words and concepts, it is without a name, a church, a cult, a theology. But it is moving in the depth of all of them.”

### **Karen Horney’s “Basic Anxiety”**

Where did this vision place Tillich intellectually in relation to the landscape of psychotherapy during the 1950s? Part of the claim of this chapter is: nowhere and everywhere. Tillich was a strange mixture of despair and joy, a chiaroscuro contrast of light and dark. The stark antimonies of his thinking thus confound the common rubrics of “pessimism” or “optimism” that define most rubrics of psychoanalytic thinking. In some ways Tillich’s valuation of human existence nature is “suspicious” and “pessimistic” in a way suggesting an affinity for Freudian orthodoxy. The somber, disillusioned mood of Freud’s attack on idealistic morality pervades his writing. In other ways, however, his belief in an essential self that is essentially good would seem to place him closer to the neo-Freudian, or so-called “revisionist,” school led by the likes of Horney, Fromm, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Clara Thompson. In the intellectual contest between essential goodness and existential estrangement, Tillich sought a dynamic, dialectical acceptance of both. He himself was impatient of the schismatic infighting that plagued the profession through the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and beyond and associated freely with therapists of all types.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In exasperation with terminological turf wars, Tillich eventually took to using the catch-all term “psychotherapy” – or sometimes “depth psychology” – instead of “psychoanalysis.” See “The Theological Significance of Psychoanalysis and Existentialism,” in *Theology of Culture*, 112. For a helpful overview of psychoanalytic schools, see Steven A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).



Yet if forced to pigeonhole him, we must acknowledge that the school with which he was undoubtedly the most closely associated – among which he could count the greatest number of friends and interlocutors – was the neo-Freudian movement, which was enjoying a moment in the sun at the time of Tillich’s turn toward psychology after the war. With the neo-Freudians Tillich sought to broaden psychoanalysis from its focus on individuals and patients towards its social and cultural implications. With the neo-Freudians he also upheld the idea of an essential goodness in human nature that Freud denied. With them, too, he dismissed Freud’s reduction of the impulses to pleasure-seeking and destructiveness. Delving into Tillich’s dealings with two of the founders of this school, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, will shed light on Tillich’s theory of personality—what he called his “doctrine of man.”

Neo-Freudianism in the 1930s and 40s represented both a major challenge to Freud’s personal authority within the psychoanalytic profession and also, simultaneously, an expansion of Freudian concepts beyond the medical field to other areas such as history, anthropology, sociology, and religion. Freud himself, of course, had been eager to speculate, in a somewhat “amateur” fashion, on the cultural and civilizational implications of his theories. By the end of World War II, however, his most self-consciously “orthodox” followers in the United States had assumed a narrowly medical and professionalized orientation – especially after 1933, when the American Psychoanalytical Association excluded non-physicians from its ranks, over Freud’s objection. As a result of this somewhat paradoxical situation, it was the schismatic neo-Freudians who, even as they sought to revise

many of Freud's central concepts, became the most influential bearers of his ideas in the realm of culture.<sup>30</sup>

With their emphasis on "environment," the neo-Freudians also made psychoanalysis amenable to liberal faith in social reform and meliorist progress. Their openness to social and cultural questions made the school in some ways more central to the postwar mental health movement – and more attractive to the postwar American intelligentsia writ large – than was the Freudian orthodoxy represented by journals like *Imago* and *American Imago*. For liberals grappling with the newfound problems of economic affluence and seeking out non-authoritarian methods of social management and improvement, neo-Freudianism promised to carry psychoanalytic insights from the stuffy analyst's office out into the world, in realms from child-rearing to criminology to politics. It also offered a basis for collaboration with neighboring fields like anthropology and sociology; the "culture and personality" theorists like Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and David Riesman all counted themselves neo-Freudians in their search for the different "modal personality types" of various cultures.

One of the earliest analysts to break with Freud along these lines was Tillich's good friend Karen Horney. Just one year older than Tillich, Horney was born Karen Danielsen in 1885 near Hamburg. An intelligent and precocious child, Karen was the daughter of a traditionally devout yet ill-tempered ship's captain (the children referred to the father behind his back as the "Bible-thrower") and a mother, Sonni, towards whom Karen was intensely loyal during her youth but whose long-suffering

<sup>30</sup> See Nathan Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, 140.

and self-sacrificing neediness Karen later came to regard as malign. The parents favored her older brother, Berndt, and the young Karen became both embittered and infatuated with him. As Horney's most attentive biographer, Bernard Paris, has shown, Horney derived much of the material for her mature theories of "basic anxiety" from her own sense of childhood insecurity and helplessness; in her words this anxiety was "the child's sense of lurking hypocrisy in the environment: his feeling that the parents' love, their Christian charity, honesty, generosity, and so on may be only pretense."

Horney's reputation today, insofar as it exists, rests largely on her early-career feminist critiques – revived by the women's liberation movement during the 1970s – of the concepts of penis envy and the Oedipus complex. (The latter, she argued, was specific to the nineteenth-century bourgeois family while the former was simply wrong.) What caused far more consternation among psychoanalytic circles in her lifetime, however, were Horney's direct attacks on the theoretical assumptions underlying orthodox psychoanalysis. By the time her friendship began with Tillich in the 1930s, Horney was a charismatic critic of reigning Freudian orthodoxies – a "gentle rebel of psychoanalysis," as her first biographer has it – both in print and on the speaking dais.<sup>31</sup>

One of the major thrusts of neo-Freudian theory was contained in the title of Horney's first book, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937). Horney's publisher, Norton, wanted the title to be *The Neurotic Personality in Our Time*, but Horney insisted on the "of." The character of neuroses was for her determined not

<sup>31</sup> See Jack L. Rubins, *Karen Horney: Gentle Rebel of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Dial Press, 1973).

by fixed biological drives but rather by culture and the family; the “neurotic personality” could thus never be described for all times and all places because neuroses grew out of the distortions of a particular culture. They were not simply “in” but “of” our time. Horney’s growing emphasis on culture was a result of her reading, beginning in the 1920s, in ethnography, anthropology, and sociology, especially the writings of her friend Georg Simmel. After her emigration to America this cultural turn was reinforced by her dialogues with anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Ralph Linton and social scientists such as Harold Lasswell, John Dollard, and Edward Sapir. Emigrating to the United States also exposed Horney to a different class of patients with different problems from those she had known in Germany, again reinforcing the role of culture in her thought.<sup>32</sup>

*The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* also laid out the rudiments of Horney’s theory of “basic anxiety,” which she would develop in her later books such as *Our Inner Conflicts* (1945) and *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950). Basic anxiety was the sense of feeling unvalued, unloved, and insecure – “a feeling of being small, insignificant, helpless, deserted, endangered, in a world that is out to abuse, cheat, attack, humiliate, betray, envy” – caused by pathological conditions in the culture, transmuted through the family. These could include:

direct or indirect domination, indifference, erratic behavior, lack of respect for the child’s individual needs, lack of real guidance, disparaging attitudes, too much admiration or the absence of it, lack of reliable warmth, having to take sides in parental disagreements, too much or too little responsibility, over-protection, isolation from other children, injustice, discrimination, unkept promises, hostile atmosphere, and so on and so on.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Paris, *Karen Horney: A Psychoanalyst’s Search for Self-Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 99-101.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), 41.

The resulting anxiety generates an overwhelming need for reassurance and safety in the child, which she pursues through various strategies such as the search for affection (“moving towards people,” in Horney’s later theory), power (“moving against people”), or detachment (“moving away from people”). The strategies, however, become compulsive, conflict with one another, and cause vicious cycles that lead to even more anxiety.

In *New Ways of Psychoanalysis* (1939), the book that expressed Horney’s critique of Freud most explicitly and that sealed her enmity with the “orthodox” wing of the movement, she urged psychoanalysis to “outgrow the limitations set by its being an instinctivistic and a genetic psychology.” By “instinctivistic,” Horney meant that Freud had posited biological drives – the “libido” or “id” in his early theory; later “Eros” and “Thanatos” – as the originary forces in human conduct, the frustration of which was the cause of both neurosis and civilization. Horney believed that drives were culturally rather than biologically determined. Destructiveness, *pace* Freud, was a reactive and defensive rather than a primary motive; it emerged as an understandable response to hostility experienced from without rather than from the frustration of primary instincts or as a primary instinct of its own. While acknowledging the existence of biological needs and instincts, Horney saw the root of neurosis not in the thwarting of the drives but rather in disturbed interpersonal relationships within the family. The nature of these family dynamics, in turn, was determined largely by the culture. Within the new paradigm, she summarized, “a

prevailing sociological orientation then takes the place of a prevailing anatomical-physiological one.”<sup>34</sup>

By a “genetic psychology,” on the other hand, Horney meant that Freud undervalued the present and saw neuroses as the repetitious playing out of the past. Horney and the other neo-Freudians did not deny, as they were sometimes accused of doing, the importance of early childhood experiences in forming the adult “character structure”; on the contrary, these experiences were the reason why neurotic patterns took the form they did. But once established, the neo-Freudians maintained, the character structure took on its own independent dynamics that could not be reduced to a mere repetition. Therapy should thus focus not on memories for their own sake but rather on the role they played in the here-and-now. “There is no such thing as an isolated repetition of isolated experiences,” as Horney wrote in *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, “but the entirety of infantile experiences combines to form a certain character structure, and it is this structure from which later difficulties emanate.” Together, this emphasis on the present and the critique of Freud’s instinct theory made neo-Freudian theory much more optimistic than orthodox psychoanalysis. Freud had defined success in therapy as the transformation of neurotic misery into ordinary human unhappiness. The neo-Freudians, on the other hand, talked of “self-realization,” “growth,” and achieving a “productive orientation.” They credited the ego with a greater capacity to mediate the conflicts within the self. As Horney put it, “when the ‘ego’ is no longer regarded

<sup>34</sup> Karen Horney, *New Ways of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1939), 8-9.

as an organ merely executing or checking instinctual drives, such human faculties as will power, judgment, decisions are reinstated in their dignity.”<sup>35</sup>

The revolt of the neo-Freudians generated an intense counterreaction and closing of the ranks from the guardians of Freudian orthodoxy in the American Psychoanalytic Association. Partly because her critique struck so close to heart of Freud’s system, partly because she was often domineering and manipulative in her dealings with colleagues, and partly, no doubt, because she was a woman in a largely male profession, Horney became an object of contempt and condescension from her psychoanalytic rivals. In 1939, she was expelled from the American Psychoanalytic Association and began her own institute, the American Institute for Psychoanalysis, with its own journal, the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. But the new movement that Horney began itself split in 1941. The polemics that accompanied these schisms – among a group of men and women professionally trained in the art of identifying vulnerabilities and breaking down resistances – became part of the lore of psychoanalysis. The orthodox Freudian psychiatrist Karl Menninger, the president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, once asked Horney at a public event why her ferociously polemical tone in her writings was in such stark contrast to her “gracious and reasonable manner in everyday life.” Horney became choked with anger, responding that “perhaps she envied Freud’s penis, and perhaps did not quite understand the English language, and she was obliged to tell the truth.” She fled the platform in tears.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Horney, *New Ways of Psychoanalysis*, 9, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Nathan Hale, *Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, [165].

Despite the condescension implied, it was not a terrible question. Even to her close friends, like Tillich, Horney's personality could be an enigma. She was personally often very warm, but she also managed to estrange almost everyone she ever worked closely with in the psychoanalytical profession. Tillich and Horney's acquaintance went back to Berlin in the 1920s, but their friendship blossomed in the 1930s when they were fellow émigrés in New York City. Horney was part of the circle of psychoanalysts, artists, writers, and other bohemians to which Tillich attached himself as a respite from the churchy dullness and buttoned-up formality of his day job at Union Theological Seminary. The group also included the novelist Eric Maria Remarque and the social psychologist Erich Fromm. When the Tillichs attempted to throw a European-style soiree on the roof of Union Seminary, Horney was the only attendee who seems to have understood the concept. Paulus had prepared short, humorous poems for each guest and placed placards at every table. But the atmosphere among the mostly American guests was stiff and the concept did not translate. Horney, however, arrived wearing a kimono and a coolie hat, with a bottle of wine tucked under each arm. Hannah Tillich later commented that she always admired Horney and appreciated her "beautiful, but invisible, attention." Horney, for her part, may have pitied Hannah due to her unhappy marriage to Paulus.<sup>37</sup>

Hannah Tillich suspected that Horney and Tillich struck up a brief affair during the 1940s. She later related a story to one of Horney's biographers that illustrates the atmosphere of gregarious, conspiratorial intimacy that prevailed

<sup>37</sup> Susan Quinn, *A Mind of Her Own: The Life of Karen Horney* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 279-81.



between the psychoanalyst and the theologian, regardless of whether or not their relationship ever became sexual. Apparently, one night a group of émigré friends were drinking sherry and talking about surrealist art in the Tillich apartment. Salvadore Dali – then living in New York – came up as a topic of conversation, and someone in the group suggested that they embark on a late night caper to find the artist and converse with him. (Tillich disliked Dali’s artistic style, once publicly referring to his painting “The Sacrament of the Last Supper” as kitsch.) Tillich and Horney, both drunk, could not stop laughing every time they looked at each other. When the group finally found Dali’s address and rang his bell, the artist appeared at the door wearing a three-piece suit and affecting a cold and formal manner. Tillich and Horney were unable to speak to Dali from excessive giggling, leaving Hannah to exchange awkward pleasantries with the artist. Obviously annoyed at the intrusion, Dali silently returned upstairs. The group tumbled into a taxi and returned home.<sup>38</sup>

Yet Tillich and Horney’s relationship evidently had another, more solemn and reflective side as well. After Horney died in December of 1952, at the age of sixty-seven and only a few months after being diagnosed with cancer, Tillich gave a moving and personal oration at her funeral. Her death came as a great shock to Tillich, posing for him the unfathomable and unanswerable “riddle” of “how could such a life which did not show any fatigue of the soul and desire to go away come so suddenly to an end?” He did not attempt to shield the other mourners from the full force of that shock:

And now we must say farewell to her, all of us who have been illuminated by the light she *gave* us, she *was* for us—all of us who have been healed and

<sup>38</sup>Quinn, *A Mind of Her Own*, 280.

strengthened by the power working in her and through her. We must say farewell, readers and listeners, patients and collaborators, friends and children. We must say farewell to her: this is the sorrow and the pain of this hour. Her light which gave light to many has ceased to shine. Memory is not what reality is. Nobody more than she would have fought against false consolations. They would be contrary to the light that came from her. We must accept that we have lost her. But we must also know that she is not lost. She belongs to the order of the eternal, after she has left irrevocably the order of the temporal. Certainly, for a long time her light will shine, though dimmer and dimmer, invisibly at last, but not lost in the oceans of worlds and world periods. But we who have received light and love from her will never be without what we have received from her.<sup>39</sup>

The eulogy had a moving effect on its listeners. Harold Kelman, Horney's colleague, lover, and rival at the American Psychoanalytical Institute, reportedly bawled throughout the service.<sup>40</sup>

Whether or not they ever became lovers, Tillich and Horney shared a great deal in common, even beyond the obvious ties of nationality, émigré status, and shared psychological interests. Both had vivacious, *bon vivant* personalities that were offset by intense bouts of melancholy and despair. Both had pious and authoritarian fathers whom they had managed to successfully defy – and in reaction to whom they developed lifelong aversions to religious orthodoxy. Both had prodigious, compulsive, and spiritualized erotic lives that were bound up with their creativity and that also caused them significant guilt and shame. Both were able to overcome periods of immobility and crisis in their younger years to achieve sustained productive orientations toward their work in adulthood. As Bernard Paris has shown, Horney folded her own personal experiences and history into her psychological writings in a way that makes much of her work a veritable self-

<sup>39</sup> Paul Tillich, "Funeral address for Karen Horney," 1953, PTP, bMS 649/61 (24), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard Paris, *Karen Horney*, 160.

portrait. As we will see in the following chapter, this strategy mirrored Tillich's own in his sermons. As Tillich observed of her, "If I were asked to say what above all was her work I would answer: she herself, her being, her power to be, the well-founded balance of an abundance of striving and creative possibility."<sup>41</sup>

Horney's influence – sometimes explicit, sometimes not – is apparent throughout Tillich's oeuvre, including *The Courage to Be*. (There is even some evidence to suggest that Horney may have originally coined the term, "the courage to be.") He regarded her as an example of what he once told a group of psychologists was the chief virtue of the analytic worldview: "the close, probing, unflinching attention to the situation in its concreteness, as it actually exists." Tillich's writings are replete with passages that contain characteristically "Horneyan" insights, especially concerning the elaborate strategies of defense and that people use to protect themselves from self-knowledge, especially when it came to their own hidden hostility.

Although Tillich and Horney shared hundreds of private conversations – Horney used to have dinner at the Tillichs' house and to tease Paulus about his affectations of "omnipotence" – only on one occasion, less than a year before Horney's death, did they engage one another in public debate.<sup>42</sup> In March 1952, the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis – an offshoot of Horney's American Institute for Psychoanalysis – held a symposium at Town Hall in New York City, titled "Human Nature Can Change," that included Tillich, Horney, Frederick

<sup>41</sup> Tillich, "Funeral address for Karen Horney," 2.

<sup>42</sup> Quinn, *A Mind of Her Own*, 279.

Weiss, and Harold Kelman (who served as chair). The forum was later published in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Horney's contribution – possibly her final piece of published writing – was a fighting affirmation of the symposium's title, seemingly aimed against her orthodox Freudian opponents:

Those people who are convinced that human nature cannot change usually have not only a static but a pessimistic view of man. In simple terms, their conviction is that man has always been and always will be greedy, envious, cruel, vindictive, and destructive. They usually contend that those who disagree with this viewpoint merely lack the courage to face unpleasant truth and try to cover it up with a rosy haze of flattering self-deception.

Against this “one-sided” view, Horney claimed to see in human nature “the possibility for good and for evil, the latter being expressed in Christian terminology in the symbol of the original sin.”<sup>43</sup>

Crucially, however, the constructive and destructive possibilities inherent in human nature “do not stem from the same forces; they are not on the same level.” Whereas the forces for growth, creativity, and self-realization “stem from man's essential nature, from the core of his being, from what we call his real self,” the evil or hostile possibilities in man were the result of “an unfulfilled life which makes him barren or destructive.” To support this view, Horney cited three kinds of evidence: the obvious effect of environmental conditions on childhood development; the tragic gap visible to practicing analysts between peoples' creative aspirations and the vindictive or destructive ways they are compelled to act; and the healing possibilities of the therapeutic encounter. Horney concluded that “the alternative to a pessimistic view of human nature is not the belief that man is good by nature but

<sup>43</sup> Karen Horney, “Human Nature Can Change” (1952), in *The Unknown Karen Horney: Essays on Gender, Culture, and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Bernard J. Paris (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 296.

that he has, as do all living beings, an innate urge and capacity to realize his given potentialities. The hope of mankind for a more constructive living together is not an illusion but a realistic possibility.”<sup>44</sup>

In Horney’s framing, then, the importance of the question, “Can Human Nature Change?” was whether the healing and psychological professions could hope to improve the lot of humankind. Were human beings, by their very nature, locked into destructive and never-ending cycles of violence, retribution, vindictiveness, and destruction, as Freud’s theories as well as the recent experience of wartime seemed to imply? Or did therapy, nurture, and social reform imply the possibility of stepping outside of these destructive cycles? Horney’s theories – as well as her own personal life – showed that she was not blind to the destructiveness of which human beings were capable. But she held out hope that these forces were the result of distortions produced by the culture and environment that were, by the correct social reforms and the dissemination of therapeutic wisdom, amenable to being healed.

For Tillich, the question of human nature had quite other implications. His response in the symposium was immediately to concede that human beings, individuals or groups, could be changed by external events: “This, it seems to me, is beyond any doubt.” The question, then, was what remained unchangeable beyond the large and manifest diversity found in human personality and culture. Tillich cited the title of his friend Kurt Riezler’s book, *Man Changeable and Unchangeable*, as a guide to thinking about human nature:

The first thing to be emphasized is that human nature could not change if there were not something unchangeable in it. This is easy to understand:

<sup>44</sup> Horney, “Human Nature Can Change,” 298.

absolute change is an impossible notion, because without a subject of which we can say that *it* changes we neither could notice nor measure a change. In our case this “it” which changes is *man*. We do not ask: has man replaced another being or will he be replaced by another being, but we ask: can this nature change, which we call human, and which remains human nature before and after the change?

Tillich was critical of “those philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists who are inclined to deny anything unchangeable in man,” who “usually point to history and the amazing changes in human behavior in every period” and who “claim that history has already proved the unlimited possibilities of change in human nature.” The fallacy in this way of thinking was that it “presuppose[s] in all historical changes that being called man which *has* history.”<sup>45</sup>

The unchangeable element in human nature, for Tillich, was “finite freedom.” Man, by definition, was that being capable of transcending his given situation “by asking questions and receiving demands, by making tools and creating language.” Unlike either his “animal ancestors” or his “angelic descendants,” man could go beyond his given situation – via thought, concepts, and language – yet also remained inescapably bound to it. Unchangeably, he possessed the freedom

to contradict his own nature, to fall away from what he essentially is and ought to be, to try to escape from himself and his true being into a sickness in body and mind, into the narrowness of compulsive self-seclusion, into imaginary worlds, into what everybody does and everybody thinks, into self-estrangement and hostility.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Kelman, Frederick A. Weiss, Paul Tillich, and Karen Horney, “Human Nature Can Change: A Symposium,” in *The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective*, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 178

It was the structure of finite freedom itself that allowed the seemingly inexhaustible diversity of human types and personalities and cultures: “The many personality structures are rooted in the *one* structure of personality.”<sup>46</sup>

Toward the end of his remarks, Tillich turned against what he elsewhere called the “residuum of humanism” in neo-Freudian thought, which it shared with much of liberal thinking since the Enlightenment. The fallacy of the “progressivistic interpretation of history” was that it forgot about man’s inherent capacity for self-destruction:

The risk implied in finite freedom can never be removed, as long as men are neither animals nor angels. In every newborn child freedom gets a new center, life a new chance and spirit a new risk. Neither social institutions, nor education, nor psychological help can change this central element of human nature. Social institutions of the totalitarian type try to transform men into things through terror: education of the adjustment type tries to transform men into easily manageable citizens, psychotherapy of the mechanistic type tries to transform men into well-functioning homunculi or artificial men. But none of them works permanently. On every level freedom breaks through managed perfection. On every level there are people who enter, to use Karen Horney’s term, a devil’s pact. And the higher the institutional, moral and educational level on which it is done, the more refined are the conditions of this pact. *You can liberate man only to his freedom.* More than this would be less. For man has the unchangeable structure of finite freedom.<sup>47</sup>

Here we see a complicated mix of influence and critique in Tillich’s orientation toward Horney. On the one hand, he invokes her concept of the “devil’s pact”: the compulsive pursuit of glory and self-idealization stemming from feelings of inadequacy and resulting in the abandonment of the “real self.” He also takes the idea of a “real self” seriously – an essentially benign nature that he sometimes also refers to as the “centered self” – in contrast to Freud’s studied pessimism on this

<sup>46</sup> “Human Nature Can Change,” in *The Nature of Man*, 178-9.

<sup>47</sup> “Human Nature Can Change,” in *The Nature of Man*, 180.

point. On the other hand, he attacks the idea, implicit in Horney's own symposium remarks, that enlightened reforms could ever permanently remove the possibility – the certainty, even – that people will contradict and estrange themselves from their real selves or essential natures. That possibility, indeed, is the nature of the freedom that constitutes their humanity.

### **Beyond Projection: Erich Fromm and Tillich's "God Above God"**

The circle around Horney and the Tillichs also included the social psychologist and Marxist theoretician Erich Fromm, who was Horney's lover and main intellectual collaborator during the mid-to-late 1930s. Horney and Fromm were at the head of a movement to revise major tenets of Freudian theory, and their relationship was intellectual as well as personal. As one mutual friend described it, "she learned sociology from Fromm and he psychoanalysis from her."<sup>48</sup> Yet if the affair was intellectually fruitful, it also bore the pathologies of most of Horney's liaisons with men, quickly developing an attitude of sickly dependence and hero-worship on her part, and a mood of disrespect and annoyance on his. (Both later wrote lightly disguised accounts of their highly neurotic affair, she in her book *Self-Analysis*, he in *Escape from Freedom*.) Things between the two ended bitterly when Fromm left Horney for Katherine Dunham, the African American dancer and choreographer who helped to pioneer modern African dance in the United States.

<sup>48</sup> Rubins, *Karen Horney*, 195.



Tillich, a friend of both Dunham and Fromm, was the one who had introduced Fromm to his new love interest.<sup>49</sup>

Although his reputation has diminished considerably in recent decades, Fromm was easily the most eminent American social psychologist of his generation. His 1942 masterwork *Escape from Freedom* (known outside the United States as *Fear of Freedom*) was among the earliest and most influential of the psychological explorations of Nazism and the “authoritarian personality.” Fromm was far better known than the other members of the Frankfurt School – the group of heterodox Marxist social theorists that came together during the early 1930s around the University of Frankfurt’s Institute for Social Research and that relocated, first to New York City and later to Los Angeles, after the rise of Hitler. He was a major name in American intellectual circles as early as the 1940s, his ideas carrying weight among social scientists, psychologists, philosophers, and indeed theologians like Tillich. (The other main Frankfurt school theorists such as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse gained a significant American following only later, among the student New Left during the 1960s.)<sup>50</sup>

Fromm was born in Frankfurt in 1900 – he was fourteen years younger than Tillich – and raised by orthodox Jewish parents. From his early years, he harbored an intense interest in religion that never entirely left him, despite the secular humanist philosophy he came to adopt in his twenties. As an adolescent he studied

<sup>49</sup> Paris, *Karen Horney*, 145-6; Lawrence Friedman, *The Many Lives of Erich Fromm, Love’s Prophet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 92-97.

<sup>50</sup> The two best treatments of the Frankfurt School are Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) and Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2016).

the Talmud and became fascinated by Jewish messianism. "More than anything else," he later wrote in his autobiography *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, "I was moved by the prophetic writings, by Isaiah, Amos, Hosea; not so much by their warnings and their announcement of disaster, but by their promise of the 'end of days.' ... The vision of universal peace and harmony between nations touched me when I was twelve and thirteen years old."<sup>51</sup> During the 1920s he became part of the circle, including Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, that founded the Free Jewish School in Frankfurt. This was a world that combined prophetic Judaism, Enlightenment humanism, and scientific naturalism. Buber's ideal of the "I-Thou" relation – by which the individual "I" achieves itself through love and relatedness to an individual "Thou" and, concurrently, to the "eternal Thou" – set the moral tone for Fromm's emphasis on man's spontaneous and active relationship to his environment and to his fellow man.<sup>52</sup>

Fromm and Tillich knew each other from their days as professors at the University of Frankfurt in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a place and a time when Marxist and Freudian ideas were in lively ferment. While Fromm's place among the pantheon of Frankfurt School critical theorists is more or less well known, Tillich was also present at the founding of the Institute for Social Research and played a large and underappreciated role in the genesis of many of the Frankfurt School's main concepts. He was friends with Theodore Adorno (who served as his assistant and whose dissertation on Kierkegaard he supervised), Max Horkheimer (whom

<sup>51</sup> Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 2.

<sup>52</sup> See Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 88-9.

Tillich helped to get an appointment on Frankfurt's philosophy faculty), and Herbert Marcuse (who later became his neighbor, and frequent intellectual sparring partner, in Cambridge). Many of the theoretical approaches of critical theory were hashed out at Tillich's "religious, philosophical, prophetic" discussion group at Frankfurt, which included Horkheimer, the economist Adolph Lowe, the sociologist Karl Mannheim, the philosopher and social scientist Friedrich Pollock, and Frankfurt's *kurator* Kurt Riezler. As a Protestant theologian, Tillich was something of an oddity in this largely secular and Jewish milieu, but he was also accepted and liked: "Paul among the Jews," some of his colleagues called him.<sup>53</sup>

At Frankfurt, Fromm was among the earliest of the twentieth-century social theorists to seek a fusion between Marxian socialism and Freudian psychoanalysis. He did so, in part, by means of recovering the existentialist and humanist implications of Marx's early writings, especially the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. "Humanist" in this context means the protest against capitalism's depersonalizing and objectifying tendencies, its treatment of people as "things," its transformation of human persons into quantifiable units of production and consumption. Whereas much of German Marxism in the orbit of the Communist or Social Democratic Parties had taken on a somewhat scientific and mechanistic flavor in previous decades, Fromm was drawn to Marx's anthropological and psychological musings. He emphasized the Hegelian/Marxian idea of *Entfremdung*,

<sup>53</sup> Horkheimer later told Marion Pauck that "there was a certain tiny shade in Tillich's voice which told one that he was a theologian." See Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 118. On Tillich and the Frankfurt School, see James W. Champion, "Tillich and the Frankfurt School: Parallels and Differences in Prophetic Criticism," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 69, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 512-530.

which he translated as “alienation.” (Tillich, for his part, preferred the translation of “estrangement.”) Man was alienated from the products of his labor, from his fellow man, and, not least, from himself.

In general, Fromm was an important agent of the recovery of the Left Hegelian tradition underway in mid-twentieth-century critical and philosophical circles. Hegel had depicted an original, undifferentiated unity of “life” or “spirit” that becomes separated or externalized from itself into various oppositions – between man and nature, subject and object, master and slave, duty and inclination, divinity and humanity. Thus split, the universal Spirit seeks reunification and reconciliation with itself through the process we know as history and in the human creations of work, culture, and religion. Ludwig Fierbach critiqued Hegel for making “Spirit” or “God” the star of this drama, when in actuality it was man who projected his own powers onto an entity outside himself; religion was thus the mark of man’s alienation from himself. Marx continued in this line and made a further critique: while for Hegel the progress of “Spirit” occurred on the level of intellection, for Marx it occurred on the level of social reality, especially in economic relations and class conflict. Under capitalist social relations, man (and in particular proletarian man) encounters the products of his own labor as objects – namely commodities – outside himself.<sup>54</sup>

At around the same time that Horney was breaking away from orthodox psychoanalysis, Fromm began to develop his own doubts about Freud’s libido

<sup>54</sup> For a philosophically sharp comparison between Tillich and Fromm, see Guyton Hammonnd, *Man in Estrangement: Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm Compared* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965).

theory and central Freudian concepts like the Oedipus complex. In the process, he became one of the founders of neo-Freudian psychoanalysis. Even more than Horney, Fromm was influenced by his readings in anthropology and ethnography. Freud, Fromm wrote in *Escape from Freedom*, “accepted the traditional belief in a basic dichotomy between man and society, as well as the traditional doctrine of the evilness of human nature.” The point of civilization, for Freud, was to hold man’s fundamentally aggressive instincts in check and in this area “society has not only a suppressing function—although it has that too—but it has also a creative function. Man’s nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product.” As he summarized, “Human nature is neither a biologically fixed and innate sum total of drives nor is it a lifeless shadow of cultural patterns to which it adapts itself smoothly; it is the product of human evolution, but it also has certain inherent mechanisms and laws.”<sup>55</sup>

Tillich’s friendship, dialogue, and rivalry with Fromm flourished while they were both exiles from Hitler’s Germany in New York City. From 1941 to 1945, the two men belonged to a regular convening of psychotherapists, liberal clergymen, theologians, and psychologically oriented intellectuals known as the New York Psychology Group. The group, which was organized through Columbia’s Seminar on Religion and Health, also included Ruth Benedict, Seward Hiltner, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May (at that point still in graduate school). It belonged to the broader movement to foster collaboration between liberal Protestantism and the psychological professions. The meetings of the NYPG ranged over a variety of topics

<sup>55</sup> Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 8, 11, 20.

concerning the relationship between theology and psychology, including “The Psychology of Faith,” “The Psychology of Love,” “The Psychology of Conscience,” and “The Psychology of Helping.”<sup>56</sup>

From its earliest meetings, Tillich and Fromm were the dominant personalities of the group. As Terry Cooper has shown in his definitive account of the NYPG, a rivalry and dialogue quickly formed between the psychologist and the theologian that divided the group and that set the tone of many of its discussions. The meetings put Fromm and Tillich’s contrasting personal styles, as well as their intellectual disagreements, on display. Fromm could be quite brash and blunt in debate, despite a somewhat studied gentleness in his manner. (Hannah Tillich, who occasionally attended the NYPG meetings herself, later said she thought Fromm’s apparent benevolence and extensive talk of “love” concealed something of the very authoritarian personality he did so much to diagnose and critique.)<sup>57</sup> In 1941, as the group’s conversations got underway, he was basking in positive attention from the publication of *Escape from Freedom* and laying the groundwork to for an ambitious new study of ethics and human nature, *Man For Himself* (1947)<sup>58</sup>. Fromm’s confidence was evident as he peppered presenters with questions, pressed for sharper definitions of key terms, proposed agendas for future meetings, and generally took command of the conversation. Tillich, on the other hand, was a less frequent attendee of the group and stuck to the practice he usually adopted at

<sup>56</sup> The background of the NYPG is given in Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, 109-148. The fullest account of its proceedings, however, is given in Terry Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology*, 99-194.

<sup>57</sup> Paris, *Karen Horney*, 145.

<sup>58</sup> Erich Fromm, *Man For Himself: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947).

meetings when his own thought was not under discussion: remaining silent while everyone else spoke and then asking a penetrating question or intervening with a masterful synthesis as things were wrapping up.

This was the pattern during the January 12, 1942 meeting of the NYPG, the second of the group's discussions on "The Psychology of Faith" and the first at which Tillich was in attendance. The meeting began with presentations on clinical material from three Jungian analysts, all women. (There was a significant Jungian contingent in the group that evinced the relative openness towards religion in Jungian psychology.) Martha Glickman described the progressive emergence of "faith" in one of her patients: from faith in nothing to faith in the analyst to faith in the larger reality of life. Elined Kotschnig described her own experience in analysis and showed the group several of her paintings, including one of a ship sailing into the darkness. The painting, she believed, expressed her newfound ability to embrace both the dark and the light sides of life, an ability rooted in the faith that "there is a power which holds the two forces together." And finally Frances Wickes described a repressed female patient pursued by a compulsive belief that her life should be perfect and Christ-like in every respect, which in practice meant servicing her husband's petty demands and expectations of feminine perfection. With the help of therapy, the woman decided to "be herself." "This marked an act of faith in the individual self and in an indwelling light of conscience in which values could be appraised," as the NYPG minutes reported.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology*, 105.

Fromm opened the discussion by asking whether a generalized definition of faith could be drawn from the presentations. Wickes responded that faith has always to do with the “emergence of self-discovery, spontaneity, and with truth.” Fromm then asked the group whether such a faith, which he endorsed, had anything to do with the traditional religious belief in God. After some back-and-forth on this question, Fromm answered it himself in the negative. Only “irrational” faith took an external authority like God as its object. Rational faith – the good kind – has no object. “Faith” – which in Hebrew had the meaning of “firmness,” Fromm noted – required no transcendent reference outside the human, psychological realm. Since God was finally a projection of human capacities, humanity needed to reclaim those capacities for itself rather than seeking for them in an extrinsic “father image.” As theorists of projection from Feuerbach to Freud had argued, theology was in fact disguised anthropology and disguised psychology.<sup>60</sup>

For Tillich, the reality – and, indeed, the pervasiveness – of projection as a religious phenomenon did not imply the non-reality of God. As the meeting was ending, he interjected that Fromm was presenting a false choice between faith in God as “a being” – a deteriorated object of human invention – and faith as mere “self-discovery.” The latter was an important element in faith but not its essence. And the former, while corresponding to the ideal of faith held by many religious people, did not do justice to the genuine paradox that inescapably arises when assigning a finite name to that which is beyond finitude. There was a kind of faith that acknowledged the reality of God as the “ground of being” – not an objectified

<sup>60</sup> Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology*, 103-5.



“being among other beings” – but that nevertheless pointed beyond the finitude of the self and could therefore never be understood in strictly internal, psychological terms. Fromm quickly agreed “up to a point,” but then repeated what he had said previously about faith being an attitude of “firmness”: “the question is not in what one has faith—that is secondary.” He asked: “What is the state of mind surrounding faith?” Tillich, although obviously sympathetic to Fromm’s critique of an authoritarian God, responded that symbols will always be necessary to express in finite language a reality that goes beyond finitude and beyond language. The proper question, for him, was, “what are the right symbols?”<sup>61</sup>

Tillich’s exchanges with Fromm in 1941 are in the background of one of the most famous (and notorious) sections of *The Courage to Be*: Tillich’s closing discussion of the “God above God,” or the “God above the God of theism,” or the “God that appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.” The God, that is to say, beyond all projections and symbols and human concepts and idolatrous claims about Him, and which is only visible after the idol has been destroyed:

For God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. I revolt and try to 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

<sup>61</sup> Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology*, 105-6. At a later meeting, Fromm complained that he did not understand the idea that “God is a symbol.” For Fromm, God was either a being who created and directed the world or there was no God at all. “God as we find him in the Bible or history was not a symbol,” he told the group. “We are not doing justice to the historic tradition of God, which is not a symbol.” To him, Tillichian formulations such as the “Ground of Being” were a sophisticated theological dodge that ignored the concreteness of God as represented in the Bible. As Terry Cooper has pointed out, this complaint of Fromm’s – from a secular perspective – actually converges with the arguments of Tillich’s conservative theological critics, such as Karl Barth and later Stanley Hauerwas, who claimed that Tillich turned the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into an ontological abstraction. See Cooper, *Paul Tillich and Psychology*, 111.

transform everything into a mere object, a thing among things, a cog in the 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.<sup>62</sup>

To be sure, this idea preceded the meetings of the New York Psychology Group in Tillich's thought, and was in any case not original to him – it went back to his early study of Schelling (who spoke of God as “the Unconditioned”), to his reading of Nietzsche (who proclaimed the “death of God”) and above all to his experience of disillusionment with the bourgeois God of German theological liberalism amid the mud and trenches of World War I. But his experience defending this conception against Fromm's charges of theological special-pleading may have helped him to give the idea its sharpest formulation. Tillich later suggested that the end of *The Courage to Be* “points to what is Fromm's basic emphasis in his whole career as a writer, a teacher and a practical psychotherapist, the anti-heteronomous attitude in all realms of life.”<sup>63</sup>

Despite their differences, Tillich was always restrained in his public criticisms of Fromm. Fromm gave the Terry Lectures at Yale on the subject of “Psychoanalysis and Religion” in 1949, the year before Tillich's own Terry Lectures on “The Courage to Be.” *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, which came out in book form in 1950, developed many of the same themes and arguments that Fromm had aired during the New York Psychology Group's discussions, including the distinction between authoritarian and humanistic religions, irrational and rational forms of

<sup>62</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 170.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Tillich, “*Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm,” 1.

faith. Tillich reviewed Fromm's work for *Pastoral Psychology*, referring positively to Fromm's "fight against the authoritarian type of religion, known to me from years of discussions." Fromm's fight, according to Tillich, was against "a heteronomous, supranaturalistic theism. And this fight is a genuine theological concern. It is the fight against idolatry in which theology and psychotherapy are allies." The weapons used in this fight, Tillich wrote, "often sound like atheism," but such atheism was "the answer to an idolatric theism."<sup>64</sup>

Tillich's critique of neo-Freudian "humanism," somewhat muted in the early 1950s by his attempts to build a religious-secular cultural alliance, became somewhat sharper as Fromm advanced into his later career and began to write books in a more straightforwardly affirmative and hortatory key. In 1955, Fromm published *The Sane Society*, a critique of modern industrial society and its alienated, commercialized, conformist citizenry. In his review of the book for *Pastoral Psychology*, Tillich began by commending Fromm's "combination of psychoanalysis and socioanalysis" and his "doctrine of man which includes classical Christian as well as old and new existential ideas." Tillich hailed what he saw as a growing, if still incomplete, convergence between humanist and theological conceptions of human nature. But he also registered a new reservation. Fromm's use of the term "alienation" – which inexactly paralleled Tillich's own concept of "estrangement" – clearly troubled him.

It seems to me that there is a difference between Christian theology and humanist psychology in this respect in spite of the use of synonymous terms. Alienation, for Fromm is a necessity of man's development and therefore something which can be overcome in the process of this development.

<sup>64</sup> Tillich, "Psychoanalysis and Religion, by Erich Fromm," 4.

From the perspective of Christian theology, this expectation was utopian.

Estrangement (or alienation, if you prefer) is a condition of human existence within time and space. Even with the right reforms to culture, society, politics, or the inner life, it is not going away. "Every conquest of it is fragmentary and ambiguous: life, by its very nature, unites creative and destructive elements." Tillich concluded:

The theologian must ask: How can man's alienation be overcome except by a power which transcends the law and *gives* what the law demands in vain? How can alienated man overcome alienation by himself? ... Without an answer to these questions Fromm's description of communitarian humanism sounds utopian, and ... shows goals but not ways."<sup>65</sup>

### **The Two Natures of Man: Existentialism and Tillich's Response to Freud**

Behind Freud's critics and domesticators, of course, was Freud himself, whose thought – untainted, as his admirers saw it, by "revisionism" – remained a force to be reckoned with on the intellectual scene long after his death in 1933. Freud, indeed, had a reputation as a kind of modernist culture-hero among a variety of intellectuals during the 1950s: lonely, mordant, stoic, unsentimental, capable of gazing into the abyss without blinking.<sup>66</sup> The 1950s saw an outpouring of

<sup>65</sup>

<sup>66</sup> See Dorothy Ross, "Freud and the Vicissitudes of Modernism in the United States, 1940-1980," in *After Freud Left*, 163-188. In a useful schematic, Ross identifies two competing strands of Freudian interpretation – a Dionysian and an Apollonian Freud – in American thought. Freud the Dionysian was a cultural revolutionary, a liberator from the chains of Victorian prudery, the explorer of the unconscious, a champion of the "night side" of life: the irrational, unbiddable, chthonic forces roiling just beneath the thin veneer of civilization. This Freud had been in evidence on the American cultural scene during the 1910s and 1920s, when psychoanalysis was one of several cultural theories that presided over the artistic, sexual, and child-rearing experiments of urban bohemia like Greenwich Village. The Apollonian Freud, on the other hand, was civilization's wary ambassador to those same forces, the arch-rationalist who wished to tame, or at least conciliate, the unconscious and whose slogan was: "where now there is id, there shall ego be." Freud the Apollonian saw the bleakness of the human predicament – trapped between aberrant instincts and repressive social interdicts -- and sought an unheroic compromise; this was his true heroism. It was the Apollonian, stoic Freud who most dominated the imagination of the immediate postwar years.

appreciation for his thought, beyond the ranks of practicing psychoanalysts themselves, that stressed his existentialist courage, his radicalism, his tragic pessimism, his willingness to look at the human situation for the disease that it was. All of these qualities allegedly made Freud's thought superior to – and more realistic than – the kind of watered-down reformism that used him to argue for more enlightened methods of child-rearing, toilet training, or better interpersonal communication.

Non-analyst champions of the “original” Freud who embraced this line of argument varied significantly in their cultural and political views: Lionel Trilling, Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno, Norman O. Brown, Philip Rieff, Susan Sontag.<sup>67</sup> Unlike many of Freud’s defenders within the psychoanalytic profession, these critics were not necessarily concerned with maintaining Freudian theory in all its particulars or for its own sake. As non-analysts, they were generally indifferent to questions of psychotherapeutic approach or technique. Many of them shared the neo-Freudian doubt that the Oedipus complex was the driving force of history Freud imagined it to be. Most of them, again like the neo-Freudians, had Marxist backgrounds of one kind or another that broadened their application of psychoanalytic ideas beyond the analyst's office to the realms of culture and society. All of them were interested in the religious implications of Freudian thought. They were all united in their admiration for Freud's mordant pessimism and existential

<sup>67</sup> The tail end of the 1950s saw the publication of three landmark books on Freud, Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1958), Brown’s *Life Against Death* (1959), and Rieff’s *Mind of the Moralist* (1959).

heroism over and against the way he had been absorbed by American optimism and conventional morality.

Unsurprisingly given his central place in midcentury American cultural and intellectual life, Tillich knew and engaged in different ways with all these latter-day appreciators of Freud during the late 1950s, at a time when he was known as Protestantism's point man on psychotherapy and when a spate of influential books about Freud in this vein were appearing. Marcuse had been an old friend from Tillich's days at the University of Frankfurt, and they reconnected when Tillich moved to Harvard and Marcuse was teaching at Brandeis. Rieff and Sontag, who were married to each other until 1958, used to join the Marcuses and the Tillichs for regular Wednesday night soirees while Rieff was also at Brandeis and when Sontag was a graduate student of Tillich's at Harvard. (Marcuse, incidentally, lived with the young couple for a year while he was writing *Eros and Civilization*.) Rieff's book on Freud, *The Mind of the Moralist*, praised Tillich for distinguishing between the "Protestant principle" of prophetic criticism and the Protestant middle class churches.<sup>68</sup> Norman O. Brown met both Tillich and Rieff at Marcuse's wedding to Inge Newman in 1956; in *Life Against Death*, Brown hailed Tillich as "the theologian who has done most to disentangle Protestantism from its alliance with capitalism."<sup>69</sup> Trilling once shared a stage with Tillich at an event at Columbia in 1958 on "Freud and the Biblical View of Man."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 297.

<sup>69</sup> Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), 224.

<sup>70</sup> No transcript of the discussion is extant, but Tillich's notes for the occasion reveal the general thrust of his presentation and begin to suggest his distance from this group of critics and the nature of his critique of Freud. After enumerating the many forms of assistance psychoanalysis had offered to Protestant theology

Tillich's own critique of Horney and Fromm, outlined in the previous section, put him in the company of all of these critics who saw naiveté and spurious affirmation in the neo-Freudians' attempts to adapt psychoanalysis to a liberal reform of culture. Tillich's relationship to psychoanalysis and its founder must be placed in the context of this ideologically heterogeneous attempt to canonize, appreciate, and engage the master directly: over the heads, as it were, of his direct disciples in the psychoanalytic profession and his liberalizers in the culture and personality movement. In each case, Tillich attempted to acknowledge the importance of Freud's insights while also offering a partial critique of his underlying view of human nature. Although Tillich's reputation is closely bound up with that of existentialism, his perspective on Freud in fact reveal him as one of existentialism's most perceptive critics.

Freud's courage, in the eyes of his midcentury admirers, was "the courage of despair." "Everything that [Freudian man] gains he pays for in more than equal coin," wrote Lionel Trilling in 1940; "compromise and the compounding with defeat constitute his best way of getting through the world." A critique of liberal social science and its soft cultural engineering lay in the background of this encomium to the Freudian sense of tragedy and irreconcilable conflict; Trilling unfavorably

in elaborating a more realistic view of human nature, Tillich turned to the irreducible and decisive difference between Freud's view of man and what he considered to be the Biblical view. Namely: "that Freud sees the human nature on one level, that of existence, and not on two, those of essence and existence (the created goodness and the fallen state of man)." This confusion led Freud to assert "man's disgust of life, sex, and culture as the normal situation" as well as his "doctrine of the superego as a result of individual and social pressures and not as the expression of man's essential nature." Here Tillich depicted Freud as a proponent of the existentialist view of human nature, a view that was legitimate insofar as it represented a protest against an idealized vision of human rationality and control but that constituted only one half of the human situation. For man is both existential estrangement *and* essential goodness. Of this critique and this position, more anon. See Paul Tillich, "Freud and the Biblical View of Man," Columbia University, October 31, 1958, PTP, bMS 649/49 (6).

compared the “tough, complex psychology of Freud” to Fromm and Horney’s “easy rationalistic optimism.” In a speech at the centenary of Freud's birth in 1955, “Freud: Within and Beyond Culture,” Trilling recounted a scene from a conference of American psychiatrists he had attended during the height of the McCarthyite Red Scare in the early 1950s. The assembled doctors and social scientists argued that the “institutionalized suspiciousness” of the anticommunist crusade was troubling not only due to the manifest harm and worry it caused to those who were targeted but also because it inhibited the formation of healthy personalities. “If part of the object-world is closed off by an interdiction,” this line of thinking went, “and if the impulse to adventure is checked by restriction, the free functioning of the ego is impaired.” Trilling agreed with this analysis up to a point – “if you enslave a man, he will develop the psychology of a slave” – but held out the biography of Freud himself as an example of its limits. It was partly in defiance of fin-de-siecle Vienna’s anti-Semitism that Freud forged his brilliant theories of self and society. As often as not, healthy and robust personalities emerged exactly out of those cultures that threw up the strictest barriers and impediments to self-realization and forced the individual into antagonism with the surrounding culture.<sup>71</sup>

Trilling was a liberal centrist; another species of enthusiasm for Freud the existentialist was expounded from the mandarin cultural and political left, by the transplanted members of the Frankfurt School. From the perspective of critical theory, it was exactly those features of Freud that made him unpalatable to the

<sup>71</sup> Lionel Trilling, “Freud and Literature” (1940), in *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Viking, 1950), 56-57, 99; Lionel Trilling, “Freud: Within and Beyond Culture,” in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking, 1965), 109-110.



revisionists -- his steeliness, his pessimism, his lack of warmth – that made him an accurate register of (and an appropriate response to) the pervasive alienation of modern man under capitalism and bureaucratic conformity.<sup>72</sup> This difference in perspective toward Freud, indeed, had been a major cause of the rift between Fromm and the other founders of the Institute for Social Research that took place in the late 1930s as Fromm broke away from orthodox psychoanalysis. Adorno stated the Frankfurt School's indictment of neo-Freudianism in a 1942 article, "Social Science and Sociological Tendencies in Psychoanalysis." The revisionist "stress on totality, as against the unique, fragmentary impulses, always implies the harmonistic belief in what might be called the unity of the personality [a unity that] is never realized in our society."<sup>73</sup> Freud's greatness consisted in his debunking of that unity, showing the sheer radicalism of what a genuine liberation of human potentialities would entail. By denying the biological root of the drives, moreover, the neo-Freudians had relieved psychoanalysis of its critical impetus and transformed it into a means of social hygiene and moral exhortation. As we have seen, Tillich echoed this position in his own critique of Fromm.

Variations on this critique became a staple of critical theory and other forms of Left Freudianism throughout the 1950s and beyond. In *Eros and Civilization*

<sup>72</sup> Critical theorists wanted to use Freud in the same way Marx had used classical political economy in the tradition of Smith, Hume, and Ricardo. Just as, for Marx, the bourgeois political economists penned brilliant anatomies of capitalist social relations while imagining that they were describing the timeless laws of the market; so Freud, for the Frankfurt School theorists, was the great pathologist of the inner life under the conditions of instinctual repression, who merely thought he was describing the permanent structure of the psyche. Hence their preference for Freud's sometimes outlandish negativity over what they saw as an unjustified – and covertly conformist – optimism and idealism of the neo-Freudians. As Theodore Adorno put the matter in *Minima Moralia* (1951), with characteristic piquancy: "in psychoanalysis nothing is true except the exaggerations." Quoted in Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 105. Tillich would adopt a similar position toward Freud.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 104.

(1955), Marcuse accused the culture and personality movement of “expurgating the instinctual dynamic and reducing its part in the mental life,” thus clearing the field for “an anachronistic revival of philosophical idealism.” In *Life Against Death* (1959), Norman O. Brown charged Fromm with linking together “psychoanalytic categories with socio-historical categories” by “sacrificing the primal psychoanalytical insight into the bodily base of all ideological superstructures.” The “anal character” became, in Fromm’s hands, the “authoritarian character”: “an autonomous spiritual attitude with no basis in the body.” Brown’s book was a plea to end repression, to embrace the “polymorphous perversity” of the body as in infants or animals, and thereby to step outside the bondage to history and civilization. As Susan Sontag summarized Brown’s view in a glowing review of *Life Against Death*, “We are nothing but body; all values are bodily values.” She presented this view as a counterpoint to “the bland ‘revisionist’ interpretation of Freud which rules American cultural and intellectual life—on Broadway, in the nursery, at the cocktail parties, and in the suburban marriage bed.”<sup>74</sup>

But this critique was culturally and politically unstable, and it also made an appearance in accounts of Freud’s intellectual legacy that were ambivalent or hostile towards sexual or instinctual liberation. Trilling, for example, wrote that Freud’s “biologism” suggested that “there is a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control, and that this residue of human quality, elemental as it may be, serves to bring culture itself under criticism and keeps it from being absolute.” In

<sup>74</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1956), 240; Brown, *Life Against Death*, 203-4; Susan Sontag, “Psychoanalysis and Norman O. Brown’s *Life Against Death*” in *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 259.

*Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (1959), Philip Rieff argued that Freud's "instinctualism" was

chiefly what gives admirable sharpness to his estimate of human nature, and makes it more valuable as a defense of the individual than the critique of his position theoretically prefigured by Dewey and carried out by such neo-Freudians as Karen Horney and Erich Fromm.... The liberal revisers of Freud, in their efforts to avoid the pessimistic implications of his genetic reasoning, tend to let the idea of the individual be absorbed into the social, or at best to permit it a vague and harried existence. Freud himself—through his mythology of the instincts—kept some part of character safe from society, restoring to the idea of human nature a hard core, not easily warped or reshaped by social experience.<sup>75</sup>

Rieff, although he is remembered today mostly as a cultural conservative and an acerbic critic of the modern academy, began his career on the Left and probably borrowed this particular insight from Marcuse.

Rieff's portrait of Freud was perhaps the most strenuous of the bunch, a veritable hero of repression. According to Rieff, Freud assumed that there was no possible escape from repressions and renunciations. These were not the result of a malign social order but rather the result of dueling and irreconcilable forces within the self. The point of psychoanalysis, in Freud's view and implicitly in Rieff's, was not to end repression or to give the instincts free play but rather to bring repression to the surface of consciousness, to make the patient aware of his choices, and to help him construct a rational ego capable of mediating between the good and the evil within the self. Freud's "ethic of honesty" only applied in the context of the therapeutic encounter, not in life more generally. Rieff's Freud is a contradictory, ambivalent character who wanted to ease the burden of sexual guilt without any

<sup>75</sup> Trilling, "Freud: Within and Beyond Culture," in *Beyond Culture*, 113; Rieff, *Mind of the Moralist*, 33.

hope of liberation, either social or personal. Freud's perspective on sexual drives and instincts was that of a doctor, a scientist, a rationalist whose subject happened to be the irrational. "Unlike Marx," Reiff writes, "Freud did not have a religious temperament. He looked forward to no salvations. He was more a statesman of the inner life, aiming at shrewd compromises with the human condition, not at its basic transformation."<sup>76</sup>

Tillich, as a Christian theologian, was concerned with salvation – although, as we have seen, his vision of what salvation meant was not the one familiar from pietistic or evangelical forms of Christianity, nor even yet the ones implied by liberal or Social Gospel utopias. It was, instead, rooted in the original meaning of the word: namely to make "heal and whole." The therapeutic aim at the heart of both religion and medicine implied an awareness of what health would mean, even if that awareness took the form of naming present sickness, negativity, and despair. And Tillich did believe in wholeness as a reality – the most important reality – even if humans could never expect for it to be fully realized within time and space and history. It was in Freud's theoretical failure to imagine the end or aim toward which human efforts were striving – even if he contradicted this failure by his commitments as a doctor and a thinker – that Tillich saw as his greatest weakness. Despite his own critique of the neo-Freudians, Tillich shared with them a critique of Freud's unrelenting pessimism and, perhaps more surprising, his existentialism.

This statement requires some unpacking, firstly because the connection between Freud and existentialism – together with the meaning of existentialism

<sup>76</sup> Reiff, *Mind of the Moralist*, x, 300.

itself – is not necessarily obvious, and secondly because Tillich is customarily thought of as the Christian existentialist theologian par excellence. Existentialism, for Tillich, represented something far more expansive than the philosophy of Sartre, its most fashionable exponent in America after World War II; it was instead a basic orientation to life, an element present in literature and philosophy going back to ancient times. Tillich saw a connection, both historical and philosophical, between psychoanalysis and the existentialist movement as it had manifested itself in the literature and art of twentieth-century modernism; psychoanalysis was the scientific expression of existentialist depth. Both existentialism and depth psychology, Tillich wrote in his 1955 essay “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” “are interested in the description of man’s existential predicament—in time and space, in finitude and estrangement,” with a focus on “the possible experience of meaninglessness,” on the “continuous experience of loneliness,” and on the “widespread feeling of emptiness.” The “depth-psychological material” in existentialist literature “from Dostoevsky to the present” was evident to anyone who had read them, as was the psychoanalytic current in the visual arts, “modern art being the existentialist form of visual art.” “It is a fact,” Tillich wrote, “that psychoanalysis and existentialism have been connected with each other from the very beginning; they have mutually influenced each other in the most radical and profound ways.” In his so-called “discovery of the unconscious,” Freud had in fact “rediscovered something that was known long before, and had

been used for many decades and even centuries to fight the victorious philosophy of consciousness.”<sup>77</sup>

The “common root” of existentialism and psychoanalysis, according to Tillich, was “the protest against the increasing power of consciousness in modern industrial society.” In the modern context, existentialism was the revolt of the irrational against the primacy of the rational or ethical subject.<sup>78</sup> Whether conceived intellectually or morally, the self-deciding subject, the conscious will, the idealized essence of Enlightenment humanism thought was the victor of the modern industrial era. In a description echoing his friends’ Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Tillich wrote,

The history of industrial society, the end of which we are experiencing, represents the history of the victory of the philosophy of consciousness over the philosophy of the unconscious, irrational will. The symbolic name for the complete victory of the philosophy of consciousness is Rene Descartes; and the victory became complete, even in religion, at the moment when Protestant theology became the ally of the Cartesian emphasis on man as pure consciousness on the one hand, and a mechanical process called body on the other hand.

The technical-controlling-instrumental orientation – towards nature and ultimately towards humanity itself – resulting from this split had led the world to the brink of total calamity. It been seen and resisted by a long line of writers and poets, for which Tillich constructed a genealogy: Pascal, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marx, Dostoyevsky, Freud. “What Freud did,” he wrote “was to give this protest a

<sup>77</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 113-114, 117-118.

<sup>78</sup> This interpretation was very much in line with that one of the more popular and accessible studies of existentialist philosophy. See William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

scientific methodological foundation. In him we see the old protest against the philosophy of consciousness.”<sup>79</sup>

It should be obvious that Tillich was generally sympathetic to this existentialist “protest.” But he still regarded it as only one half of the truth about human nature and remained highly critical what he called “pure” existentialism, whether exemplified philosophically by Sartre or Heidegger or psychoanalytically by Freud. In both cases, Tillich saw an exclusive focus on estrangement as well as a failure to distinguish between the existential predicament of human beings and their essential nature, i.e. that from which they are estranged. Tillich was half existentialist, half essentialist. For “if you speak of man’s existential predicament as opposite to his essential nature, you must in some way presuppose an idea of his essential nature.” The “pure existentialists” wished to deny essence just as the classical idealists had sought to banish the phenomenological terrors, anxieties, and meaninglessness experienced within existence. There was a good reason why much of western philosophy and theology had for so long contrasted the two categories of “essence” and “existence.” Both perspectives were equally necessary: essential unity and existential disruption – as well as the urgent, ever continued and ever thwarted need to overcome the gap between them.<sup>80</sup>

Tillich outlined the “tripartite structure” on which a properly Christian understanding of human nature was based. The first concept was essential

<sup>79</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 114-117.

<sup>80</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 117.

goodness: in Augustine's formulation, *Esse qua esse bonnum est*. "This Latin phrase," wrote Tillich, "is a basic dogma of Christianity. It means 'Being as being is good,' or in the biblical mythological form: God saw everything that he had created, and behold, it was good." The second statement is the idea of the Fall of Man, meaning "the transition from this essential goodness into existential estrangement from oneself, which happens in every living being and in every time." Existentialism and psychoanalysis had been crucial in helping the liberal theological tradition – so long a redoubt of bourgeois philosophical idealism – to recover an awareness of this universal condition of fallenness by exploring "the boundary line between healthy and sick" and by asking the crucial question, "how is it possible that a being has a structure that produces psychosomatic diseases?" This was a profound, but incomplete, insight. The third element "refers to the possibility of salvation": the return to health, the recovery of wholeness, the reunion with source. "These three considerations of human nature," wrote Tillich, "are present in all genuine theological thinking: essential goodness, existential estrangement, and the possibility of something, a 'third,' beyond essence and existence, through which the cleavage is overcome and healed." (This is also Tillich's trinitarianism.)<sup>81</sup>

By failing to distinguish these three elements, Freud and other existentialists had fallen "into innumerable confusions." Sartre's famous assertion, for example, that "existence precedes essence" was for Tillich logically impossible. It was another way of saying that there is no such thing as a human nature. But there obviously is;

<sup>81</sup> Tillich, "The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis," in *Theology of Culture*, 117-119.



otherwise the word “human” has no meaning. Even to say that people are free to create their own nature is to claim that they have a nature, namely a nature of freedom.<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, similarly, “talks as if there were no norms whatsoever, no essential man, as if man makes himself.” And yet at the same time, he distinguishes between “authentic existence and unauthentic existence, falling into the average existence of conventional thought and nonsense—into an existence in which he has lost himself.” Even the most radical existentialist, therefore, “if he wants to say something, necessarily falls back to some essentialist statements because without them he cannot even speak.” As for Freud, his pessimism about man was at odds with his therapeutic optimism, for it was logically impossible to identify and attempt to heal sickness without an at least unconscious sense of what health would mean. Freud, according to Tillich, “like most great men, was not consistent. With respect to the healing process he knew something about the healed man, man in the third form, teleological man.”<sup>83</sup>

On the theoretical level, though, Freud’s inability “to distinguish man’s essential and essential nature,” led him towards “dismay about culture” and “negative judgments about man as existentially distorted.” Specifically, Freud viewed man “as infinite libido which can never be satisfied and which therefore produces the desire to get rid of oneself, the desire he has called the death instinct.” In contrast to some of the neo-Freudians, who rejected altogether the idea of the

<sup>82</sup> As Tillich elsewhere pointed out, however, this would be to attribute to man what medieval theologians had attributed to God: total freedom, self-sufficiency, “aseity.” And, as every good existentialist knows, this is not the radically bounded and finite reality in which human beings live. See Tillich and Carl Rogers, “A Dialogue for Our Time.”

<sup>83</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 120-121.

death instinct and its root in “infinite libido,” Tillich in fact thought Freud was onto something in this idea, which represented a brilliant and invaluable insight into the state of man under the conditions of existential estrangement – but only under these conditions, not altogether. The theory of infinite libido, in fact, was closely parallel to the classical Christian concept of “concupiscence”: normal desire run rampant, the “indefinite striving beyond any given satisfaction, to induce satisfaction beyond the given one.” But what in Christian theology was a distortion of the good – albeit a very common one – was made in Freudian theory into the universal state of things. In the situation of essential goodness, desire “is directed to a definite special subject, to content, to somebody, to something with which he is connected in love, or *eros*, or *agape*, or whatever may be.” In this state, “you can have libido, but the fulfilled libido is real fulfillment, and you are not driven beyond this indefinitely.” But Freud denied this possibility, because Freud saw man “only from the point of view of estrangement and not from the point of view of essential goodness.”<sup>84</sup> This was his default.

That Tillich chose the concept of concupiscence as a point of comparison between Christian theology and Freudian theory – to show the latter’s psychological insight as well as its basic philosophical limitations – is biographically apt. For, as the next chapter will show, Tillich was no stranger to libido in his own life, either as “real fulfillment” or as “indefinite striving beyond any given satisfaction.” The study

<sup>84</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 119-20.

of his personal life reveals what he would have called an “ambiguous mixture” of goodness and corruption. If the goodness was “essential,” and the corruption “existential,” then this does not mean that Tillich attached any the less importance to the latter. Existence is the state in which we live. Even after all his criticism, Tillich still viewed Freud as “the most profound of all the depth psychologists,” who in his pessimism had seen “more about human nature than all his followers who, when they lost the existentialist element in Freud, went more to an essentialist and optimistic point of view.”<sup>85</sup> Despite his longing for health, Tillich was under no illusion that he himself or human beings generally were not sick. It was the awareness of this drastic polar tension – and his refusal to deny the significance of either pole – that lent vitality and dynamism to his thought as well as to his person.

<sup>85</sup> Tillich, “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 120-1.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LOVE'S STRANGE WORK TILlich THE PERSON

"Time runs from the beginning to the end," wrote Tillich in the title sermon from his book *The Eternal Now*, "but our awareness of time goes in the opposite direction."<sup>1</sup> So it is for historians: we begin at the end of the past -- namely, the present, where we live – and through reading, research, and imagination attempt to delve into the deeper and deeper past, even if at the end of our labors we relate the "story" of the past as a linear forward movement of time. But the depth that we are seeking in the past is not a chronological depth – the point in time farthest removed from the one where we currently stand – but rather a cognitive depth. We are trying to penetrate, in thought and understanding, to the inner mystery of past events, people, institutions, processes. This is an unending task because the mystery of the past is inexhaustible. It is inexhaustible at all times and in all places and for all people, including people, such as Tillich, who devoted their lives to weighing and considering themes such as depth and time and inexhaustible mystery. This chapter is an attempt to pause and to consider Tillich himself through the lens of depth while simultaneously meditating on what depth means. Depth: that dimension of being to which Tillich ascribed both religious and psychological significance and on the basis of which he considered a dialogue between theology and psychotherapy to be fruitful. The chapter is an experiment – and, like all experiments, a risk of failure – in approaching an individual person who had great insight and understanding

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Eternal Now" in *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 123.

about other persons, in the spirit of his own approach. It is a descent into the depth of Tillich. And it necessarily begins on the surface, with “what he was like.”

### **The Theologian as Therapist**

America, Tillich told his friends and biographers Wilhelm and Marion Pauck late in his life, was symbolized for him by “the long series of couples waiting for him at railroad stations or in airport lobbies, who entertained him in their homes and encouraged and applauded him.”<sup>2</sup> After his move to Harvard in 1955, Tillich was on the road almost every weekend: giving lectures, appearing at public events, meeting with groups of interested faculty and students. His growing profile after the success of *The Courage to Be*, together with the flexibility of his new appointment at Harvard, allowed Tillich to assume the role he had once inhabited in Germany, had long coveted in America, and had felt unable to assume fully at the churchy environs of Union Theological Seminary: the free-roaming public intellectual, the theologian of culture, the thinker “on the boundary,” unbound by doctrinal, disciplinary, or geographical constraints in his teaching and lecturing.<sup>3</sup> These were Tillich’s golden

<sup>2</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 256.

<sup>3</sup> See, for clarity on this point, Durwood Foster’s address to the 2010 annual meeting of the North American Paul Tillich Society: “to construe the Tillich I’ve come to realize I knew at Union, picture two theologians indwelling one cerebrum—two keenly intent theologic mindsets, both hugely erudite, both potently creative, sharing, though never evenly and sometimes contentiously, a single frenetic career nearing high tide. There was indelibly in Paulus what the 1919 lecture dubbed the ‘theologian of culture,’ his calling from deep down and—though repudiated as his path in 1919—there was also—with unsparing resolve and contextual necessity once at Union—the “theologian of the church” whom the seminary hired. ... The theology of the church, Tillich had reminded the Kant Society, is governed by the norm of its tradition. But the theologian of culture, he fervently averred, ‘is not bound by any such consideration.’ Emancipated from all traditional norms, this theologian ‘is a free agent in living culture open to accept not only any other form but also any other spirit.’ For this species of theologian, which 33 year old Paulus says is his vocation, theology is not about ‘God as a special object’ but about religion everywhere as ‘directedness toward the Unconditional,’ or in the phrase later settled upon ‘was uns unbedingt angeht.’ Such ‘unconditional concern’ is the core of every culture, the culture being its varied forms. Unnamed, what *Theologie der Kultur* is can be seen in Hegel and Nietzsche—or all the great philosophers. It is the

years, of which he said to his wife at the time: "Harvest time is here; indeed I am now gathering in my harvest!"<sup>4</sup>

Despite the crowdedness and itinerancy of Tillich's lifestyle during this time, however, he retained his lifelong genius for intimate friendships with the most varied kinds of people – not least those who hosted him on his travels. One such set of hosts was Alice and Ted Brown of Eugene, Oregon, with whom Tillich stayed during a four-day stint of lectures and seminars he gave at the University of Oregon in 1956. These were the sorts of people he later remembered to the Paucks as symbolic of America. Following his visit, Alice Brown wrote to thank Tillich for "the remarkable unity of your words and your self." She added: "The two should not be separated." Ted and Alice Brown had been reading and admiring the theologian for years prior to his visit, and had "accepted intellectually the wisdom of your words." But it was "you as yourself that gave us understanding." Tillich's visit, they reported, "still causes vibrations all around us – not only in our friends who heard you in Eugene, but in those who feel what has happened in us."<sup>5</sup>

Tillich seems to have left a deep and personal impression upon this professor and his wife. During his time in Eugene, he talked the couple through a variety of life problems related to Ted's career, their marriage, and their personal histories. Alice Brown did not elaborate on what passed between the theologian and the young

only theology that is really wissenschaftlich, meriting university status—as Tillich's 1923 *System der Wissenschaften* further expounds." Durwood Foster, "Merging Two Masters: Tillich's Culminating Years at Union," *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Pauk and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Brown to Paul Tillich, February 7, 1957, PTP, bMS 649/126. For Tillich's visits to college campuses, see Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 292-5 and Paul Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 141-146.

couple, but the conversations among them were transformative, especially in her husband's case:

About Ted – I do not think that I should be the one to interpret what has happened. What can be said is that he has been set free from the self-hatred that possessed him – that he has known acceptance in a way that has not been possible before – and that we have been able once more to love each other.

Tillich often stated his view that even a brief experience of genuine acceptance by another human being can change the course of a whole life. The encounter with Tillich left the Browns with sadness about his return to Cambridge, particularly for Alice: "I, as a woman, lean more on the comfort of your presence than does Ted, I think." But also with hope for the future: "We can only take each step with the assurance that the next one will also be possible." <sup>6</sup>

Tillich's effect on the Browns, like his effect on many others, can only be called therapeutic, in the original meaning of that word – healing and restoring – rather than in its polemical distortion. It would not be an exaggeration, even, to call Tillich a lay psychotherapist. He believed, as we have seen, that the task of healing – physical, mental, and spiritual – was not bound to vocational specialists like doctors, therapists, and ministers. Rather, it belonged to all humans as humans, as "neighbors," as fellow sinners and sufferers themselves in need of healing. And in his own relationships he took the responsibility of healing very seriously. At both Union and Harvard, he would spend hours in his office with students, colleagues, and other visitors – fingering his signature paper clip and talking people through various dilemmas of career, politics, love, marriage, desire, friendship, belief and doubt. For

<sup>6</sup> Brown to Tillich, February 7, 1957, PTP, bMS 649/126.

old friends in need of advice, he would often set aside hours at a time from his busy schedule to talk over the phone. People sought Tillich out for counsel – sometimes even when, like the philosopher John Randall or the theologian Georgia Harkness, they regarded him as an intellectual opponent.<sup>7</sup>

Tillich was, by all accounts, a receptive listener. He considered listening to be an art every bit as complex and creative as speaking. In a short talk he gave sometime during his Harvard years, “On Listening,” he stated, “He who knows how to listen knows how to make friends.” He began the talk by reporting the story of how one his own friendships began:

I was at a dinner table when I first met him. He talked. I had answers, but I did not answer. I had protests, but I did not protest. I knew more about the subject, but I did not say so. I listened, and so we became friends, and soon he also could listen to me. My listening had opened us for each other and for the many things we had in common.

Tillich then moved on to a negative example, also from his own experience:

She did not speak, but I listened. I listened to her silence and I understood. She spoke and I listened to the way in which she spoke and I understood. She spoke and I reacted quickly with a common sense answer and she was hurt. A door was shut.

Tillich observed a connection between this way of listening – one at which he had failed, in the latter case – and what in psychotherapeutic circles was then being called “non-directive counseling.” Listening, for Tillich, had a therapeutic, an ontological, and even an erotic aspect. As openness to the concrete situation, listening was a duty of love. “Love listens ... For listening means going out of oneself into the other one. It means hearing through the words of the other what is behind

<sup>7</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-Hand*, 47-9; Pauck and Pauck, 157-9; Durwood Foster, “Merging Two Masters,” 9.



his words. It means hearing what is not said. It means forgetting for one moment one's own best ideas and wisest counsels. It is a kind of emptying oneself to give space within oneself to the other one.”<sup>8</sup>

This therapeutic sensibility – again, in the better sense of that term – also suffused Tillich's many relationships with women. After his death, Tillich's love life became notorious when his wife, Hannah Tillich, published a scandalous and embittered memoir that publicly exposed his prolific amorous career and some of his sadomasochistic sexual proclivities. Tillich's love life is a complicated and ambiguous subject that will be taken up more fully later in this chapter, but suffice it to say for that many of these relationships were in fact “helping” and “healing” affairs – pastoral care, from a certain perspective – in which he offered counsel, support, encouragement. Of the many women to whom Tillich was close, the Paucks write:

He comforted them and sympathized in their days of sorrow, he celebrated their joys and successes, he advised them, encouraged them to fulfill themselves in their personal as well as their professional lives. He preached to them incessantly to avoid the pitfalls of compulsive self-giving, which he felt was the great danger implicit in the monogamous relationship. He urged them to remain open, even as he was, to the infinite experiences of life.<sup>9</sup>

But although it emerged in a unique way with his women friends, this erotic/therapeutic quality in Tillich was by no means limited to his relations with the opposite sex; indeed, he believed that an erotic, and even a libidinal, dimension was present in all human relationships.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, “On Listening,” PTP, bMS 649/61 (13).

<sup>9</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 89.

## Tillich's Personal Presence

Those who knew Tillich in a personal or confidential capacity – and there were many – remembered that often it was nothing in particular he said which made a difference for them, but rather his quality of attention, his way of carrying himself, his obvious sincerity and sensitivity, his “presence.” Rollo May devoted an entire chapter of his book on Tillich to the latter’s famous “personal presence,” which May says “brought a kind of joy, a mild ecstasy.” He adds: “The sexual analogy is not out of place.”<sup>10</sup> Tillich’s presence was an unusual combination of contemplative repose, zestful bonhomie, Old World charm, and anxious, sometimes melancholic yearning. His sense of timing was impeccable; his revival of the concept of the *kairos*, Greek for “the right time” – in contrast to the linear, regimented “clock time” of *chronos* – was rooted in his vital and physical way of going through the world. He had, as his wife Hannah put it, “animal grace.”<sup>11</sup> His Harvard secretary, Grace Leonard, recalled an early impression of him as “a genial, but slightly anxious Buddha” and characterized his presence as “an expectant stillness beneath which stirred a controlled tension.”<sup>12</sup> This combination, indeed, was part of his effectiveness as a counselor and confidante: he at once shared in the problems of those he listened to – never counting himself above or beyond any human frailty – and yet, at the same time, brought to every encounter a sense of care as well as a deep, restive quiet that was no less genuine for feeling somehow impersonal.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rollo May, *Paulus*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-Hand*, 17, 74.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, a letter from Dorteia Poelchau, an old friend and the wife of a Nazi resister and clergyman, in which she speaks of “his way of making decisions, of relating to people without any aggression, with an almost impersonal but warm love.” Quoted in Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 216.

But he was no harmless pushover, either, and he freely offered his unvarnished opinions to those who asked for them – sometimes to those who did not. May remembered one occasion when a good friend of both of theirs had given up all hope on life, spiritually and psychologically, in the midst of a protracted struggle with cancer. Tillich, upon seeing her in this state, cried out, “Helen, you must *love* life.” And it worked: something in his manner snapped her out of her depression.<sup>14</sup> As May put it, in the latest psychotherapeutic idiom of the day, Tillich could be “directive,” even stern, when he believed the situation demanded it; certainly he was not above expressing annoyance or frustration. This was true especially of his old friends from Germany, such as Adolf Lowe and Herman Schafft. His correspondence with his childhood friend and German-language translator Maria Rhine is full of forthright and sometimes brutally candid admonitions, “compassionate criticism” as he and his friends referred to it.<sup>15</sup> After Rhine barraged Tillich with an litany of complaints and suspicions about Tillich’s other translators, he urged her to “forget these small disharmonies with people” and blamed her paranoia on overstrain from “your continuous bodily sickness and your immense work.” “Everybody esteems you very highly and mice are not elephants,” he added. When Rhine continued to complain, he told her to “Please take yourself and all the others with a little bit of superior humor and life will be much easier and better for you.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> May, *Paulus*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 216.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Tillich to Maria Rhine, December 12, 1956, April 17, 1957, PTP, bMS 649/178.

This was more than idle advice. There was a lightness and comedy about Tillich's way of being in the world that belied his reputation as an avatar of midcentury seriousness and disillusionment. Grace Leonard recalled Tillich as "a contradictory mixture of sophistication and disarming naivete."<sup>17</sup> Her memoir of his years at Harvard in the late 1950s relates a variety of often very funny anecdotes that illustrate this endearing mixture: nodding off to sleep during a graduate seminar but then uncannily rousing himself at the perfect moment to chime in with an apposite comment; almost declining an invitation to John F. Kennedy's inauguration, with a seat near the speaking dais, because it conflicted with a previously scheduled class; insisting on changing seats at a restaurant because he did not want to have to sit facing two prim, elderly ladies with judgmental looks on their faces; writing an outraged, and unexpectedly effective, letter to a seminary admissions committee in response to a standard student recommendation form that in his opinion oversimplified human complexities; expressing bafflement at the use of acronyms in his correspondence but then later admitting, with a twinkle in his eye, that he only pretended not to understand such things because he was so annoyed by "initialese."<sup>18</sup> The realm of administration and practical affairs was particularly befuddling to him.

Landon Gilkey, Tillich's student at Union theological seminary, put it best in a remembrance of his teacher:

Paul Tillich was a lovable as well as an awesome man. There was something childlike about him, a hint of vulnerability, of near helplessness, that made even much younger persons, like graduate students or assistants, feel

<sup>17</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-Hand*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 30-1, 51-3.

protective about him. He seemed (even if he may not have been) barely able to cope, near at times to panic, subject himself to the terrifying modes of angst of which he spoke with such familiarity.... This vulnerable aspect of Tillich, of course, united with his vast intellectual power and the strange magnetic vitality that emanated from him to give him extraordinary personal presence, a kind of dialectical coincidentia oppositorum which, like the universe of being he reported to us, combined at once dynamics, form, and alienation, in short both depth and mystery. His was a power of personal being that was also accessible, almost "cuddly," and so a numinous power united with a pathos and comedy that were infinitely attractive.

Gilkey continues in his recollection:

Stories gathered naturally around Tillich. This was not because he was "funny," either a natural comic or an experienced raconteur—anything but. It followed, rather, that from this rare union of power and pathos, of supreme intellectual strength with a sort of inner frailty and outer vulnerability. Funny things happened to him. He was just helpless enough to be continually buffeted here and there; and he was strong and powerful enough so that this buffeting was funny and neither pathetic nor tragic.

Gilkey provides a number of excellent examples of this tragic-comic buffeting. Once, while Tillich was visiting Vanderbilt University, Gilkey attempted to interest him in taking a walk on a wooded property south of Nashville, knowing Tillich's reputation as a "nature mystic." But Tillich refused to get out of the car because of his fear of snakes. "Are zere *zerpents* here, Langdon?" he asked. Gilkey's comment: "He did not say, 'snakes,' a secular beast at best; he said 'zerpents,' a much more formidable and mysterious sort of creature, a creature transparent to the unconditional power of life and of death in nature."<sup>19</sup>

To spend time around Tillich was to be transported into a realm of mystery, enchantment, heightened spiritual reality – a residue, at least partly, of his

<sup>19</sup> Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 197-8, 200-1.

upbringing amid the environs of nineteenth-century German Romanticism.<sup>20</sup> Even as he matured, Tillich was exceptionally loyal to his childhood self, and indeed to all of the previous versions of himself. The childlike quality in him is disorienting, because in some ways he was the most mature, experienced, and disabused of men; a veteran of war, revolution, and political upheaval; a sharp and sober creature of the twentieth century. The contrast between these two modes – innocence and experience – was the union of opposites that Gilkey says gave him so much personal charm. Although much of his writing concerns themes of the loss of innocence and the tragic necessity of accepting guilt, he never entirely gave up his own innocence; his wife, when recalling her visual memory of him after he died, writes of “the white of innocence he had not been able to destroy.”<sup>21</sup> Rollo May thought that his boyishness – in combination with his intellectual prodigiousness – was partly what accounted for his special appeal to women. “In one way he was a little boy whom women yearned to take care of. But from another side he was the man of great mind who took them on journeys through vast solar systems of ideas.”<sup>22</sup>

With Tillich there was always a vivid point and counterpoint, a strong yes and a strong no, both gentleness and what he called “aggressivity.”<sup>23</sup> His moods tended to veer between melancholy and ecstasy, sometimes punctuated by a contemplative, preternatural calm. As Hannah put it, describing the early days of their relationship, “I got used to his falling from elation to despair and rising again to

<sup>20</sup> For the romantic background of Tillich’s upbringing, as well as his “nature mysticism,” see Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, 4-6.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 242.

<sup>22</sup> May, *Paulus*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

elation.”<sup>24</sup> In 1956, near the height of the popularity of *The Courage to Be*, a young seminarian who had recently read the book wrote to Tillich speculating that “at one point in your life you must have passed through a starting gate that took tremendous courage” and asking “when was “the point in your life where you were able to say Yes to your being, and know that you meant it, regardless?” Although there was an obvious answer Tillich could have given – his experiences in the trenches of World War I – the response he gave instead was revealing: “I would like to give a more definite answer to your question but I cannot because my own development is not characterized by periods of depth and periods of height, but a kind of continuous interpenetration of depth and height. This may be rooted in a kind of vitality which I would consider in the classical description of common grace.”<sup>25</sup> For him, the interplay of negation and affirmation, despair and transcendence, anxiety and courage was not to be confined to a single moment but rather belonged to the essential dynamic of all life. This conversation between yes and no was the source of his vitality. In his view, it was the source of all vitality.<sup>26</sup>

There were those who found Tillich’s presence to be *too* vivid – to the point that spending time around him could be exhausting. May tells a story about going sailing with Tillich on Lake Squam, near the Mays’ summer home in New Hampshire, when Tillich began to relate an obviously meaningful childhood memory of when his father had taken him sailing on one of the lakes around Berlin. May, however, was

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Carl E. Silver to Paul Tillich, February 4, 1956 and Paul Tillich to Carl E. Silver, February 9, 1956, PTP, bMS 649/186. “Common grace” is theologically distinct from “special grace” or “saving grace” – the decisive, ecstatic moment of the conversion experience, towards which Tillich was often skeptical.

<sup>26</sup> See Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 72-8.

“not up to the intensity of the conversation” and “felt trapped in the eighteen-foot sailboat.” He ended up taking a nap on board to escape the onslaught of intimacy, as he felt it.<sup>27</sup> Tillich often made his Union Seminary colleagues uncomfortable by responding to a simple, “How are you?” in the elevator with an account of his own existential despair.<sup>28</sup> Tillich’s relentless personalism was related to his tendency to relate everything back to the categories of his own thought. He paid close attention to his surroundings, to be sure, but he also lived mentally within his own philosophical-theological system. Once while visiting the University of Florida, a young academic giving him a tour of campus showed him the intricate system of levers and pulleys that operated the auditorium’s stage curtain. Tillich marveled at the machinery and remarked that it struck him as a symbol of the demonic: those partly creative, partly destructive intrapsychic powers in the world that he sensed so keenly in politics, in art, in culture, and in himself. The professor’s reaction was, “This guy just doesn’t stop!”<sup>29</sup> The similar assessment of Mary McCarthy, whom Tillich once attempted to seduce during a transatlantic steam ship voyage, was even harsher: “I have never met a man with so much egoism and so little confidence in himself ... He was also under the impression that he brought bad weather with him, like Jonah. If I said, ‘It’s stormy weather today,’ he’d answer, ‘I should call it rather ‘Tillich-weather.’”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> May, *Paulus*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 172.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Kimball to Hannah Tillich, January 14, 1970, Hannah Tillich Papers, bMS 721/1 (30-32).

<sup>30</sup> Mary McCarthy to Hannah Arendt, August 1956, quoted in *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 40.



Unsurprisingly, Tillich's personal magnetism made him a great teacher. It was in the midst of prepared and spontaneous speech – translating the chaos of his inner experience and speculations into the order of words and thoughts and concepts – that many of his friends considered him to be at his best. From the numerous extant recordings of his lectures, sermons, and talks with students, it is possible to hear his words as he spoke them. Tillich's thick German accent is perhaps the most immediately salient feature to the Anglophone listener; beyond this, what impresses is the sonorousness of his voice, the clarity of his verbal expression, and the immense, palpable power of his individual presence.<sup>31</sup> Tillich lectured from minimal notes and spoke slowly, allowing his thoughts and words to take shape in the moment of their delivery.<sup>32</sup> He once wrote that "I have always walked up to a desk or pulpit with fear and trembling, but the contact with the audience gives me a pervasive sense of joy, the joy of creative communion, of giving and taking, even if the audience itself is not vocal."<sup>33</sup> Audiences brought something out in Tillich; all of the essays and books he wrote during his career were originally given as lectures, often at the invitation of some group or professional society.<sup>34</sup> The first time his wife Hannah saw him lecture, at his now-famous 1919 address before the Kant Society in Berlin, she initially felt nervous on his behalf due to his anxious, maladroit, and shabbily dressed appearance before he began. "[W]ith his very first words at the podium," however, "he was transformed. His voice rang out clearly;

<sup>31</sup> See, especially, the audio recordings of Tillich's lectures, sermons, and speeches available through the Paul Tillich Media Collection of Union Presbyterian Seminary.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Lee, "Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage," *Ecotopia*, August 26, 2010, <http://ecotopia.org/paul-tillich-a-reminiscence-and-homage/>.

<sup>33</sup> Tillich, "Autobiographical Reflections," 15.

<sup>34</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-Hand*, 32.

indecision had fled. He became the instrument of the powers of thought; *he was the word.*"<sup>35</sup>

There was, as his Harvard teaching assistant Paul Lee put it, "an adequacy that was almost Latinate" about Tillich's choice of words: "the adequatio between thought and thing." "The Great Formulator," his TAs sometimes called him.<sup>36</sup> His words sounded – still sound – old, venerable, thoughtful, steeped in a variety of rich philosophical traditions: Greek ontology, medieval scholasticism, Renaissance humanism, German classical idealism. Tillich thought and cared deeply about words; in addition to the agonized efforts he put into choosing a technical vocabulary for the elaboration of his system, he also organized many of his talks and lectures around etymological origins and lineages. Commonplace words like "surface," "decision," or "interesting" became, in his hands, windows into the history of western thought and its recurring problems.<sup>37</sup> What was exciting about these exercises was not simply their erudition – impressive as that was – but rather the personal embodiment he gave to the words, concepts, and perspectives he was explaining. "When he recited the fragment from Parmenides," remembered Lee, "everyone in the class thrilled at the intact transmission from the source. It was carried in his voice and in the substance of his person."<sup>38</sup> Rollo May wrote that listening to Tillich speak, you could "feel the spirit of the ancient Greeks, the Middle

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, "Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage."

<sup>37</sup> See, especially, the lecture "Surface and Depth" from the series he gave at Harvard in 1961 on "Man's Self-Interpretation."

<sup>38</sup> Lee, "Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage."

Ages, the Renaissance, and the modern age all brought together in one all-embracing, harmonious whole.”<sup>39</sup>

In the tradition of the classical Greek philosophers, Tillich believed that the most vital educational experiences occurred in the spoken exchange between student and teacher, “the original form of dialectics.”<sup>40</sup> He enjoyed taking questions from his audience, and possessed that special capacity of great teachers to extract from a confused or inarticulate question the nub of a serious concern.<sup>41</sup> “Yes, I am so grateful for your question,” is one of the recurring phrases from transcripts of his talks. And: “Ah yes, and now you bring our discussion into the realm of [the psychological, the sociological, the ethical, the ontological].” Some of his more intelligent students were even occasionally annoyed by this tactic, finding it borderline inauthentic. Tillich himself wrote about this aspect of teaching in his address, “On Listening,” and connected it to depth psychology. “There are stupid questions,” he acknowledged. “But if the professor knows how to listen he hears the hidden question behind the spoken question. He realizes the serious concern behind its inadequate expression.”<sup>42</sup>

For some – students, friends, and listeners alike – it was his face that left the most lasting impression. Tillich had an extraordinarily expressive face. May recounted that “Tillich’s face changed expression with everything he said—showing

<sup>39</sup> May, *Paulus*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 16.

<sup>41</sup> As his teaching assistant Lee wrote, “He liked getting questions. Another one of his best traits. He could turn a dumb question into a major insight. One time I asked him a question about something, as we walked over to class and he rolled out an answer that even impressed him and he said: “See what you brought out of me?” Lee, “Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage.”

<sup>42</sup> Tillich, “On Listening.”

sometimes agony, sometimes wonder, sometimes joy, but in any case mirroring his inner, personal commitment to what he was saying.”<sup>43</sup> Those who attended his lectures and sermons frequently remembered this quality about him; recall Alice Brown’s comment on “the remarkable unity of your words and your self.”<sup>44</sup> Or Hannah: “*he was the word.*”<sup>45</sup> But it came out in more private, contemplative settings, too. In a poem, “Christmas Eve, 1961,” written decades after the fact, Tillich’s good friend Joan Brewster recounted a holiday scene when the Tillichs and the Brewsters exchanged gifts: a Ben Shahn lithograph and a copy of Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*. What most stayed with Brewster was the memory of Tillich’s “gentle lion face/In contemplation,/the myriad searching bees/Of your deep mind/Hived now/And resting/As that silence/Brimmed/With Spirit’s presence,/Being’s mystery.”<sup>46</sup> Brewster was not the only one to note the “leonine” quality of Tillich’s face. Others, especially in his leaner, younger years, found the face to be “wasplike.”<sup>47</sup>

Tillich was fascinated by faces – also by masks. For him, indeed, the human face *was* a kind of mask, simultaneously giving form to, but also concealing, the hidden reality within. His influential pamphlet from the 1920s on “The Demonic” began with an invocation of “the art of primitive peoples and Asiatics, embodied in statues of their Gods and fetishes, in their crafts, and dance masks.”<sup>48</sup> He liked to

<sup>43</sup> May, *Paulus*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Alice Brown to Paul Tillich, February 7, 1957, PTP, bMS 649/126.

<sup>45</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Joan Brewster, “Christmas Eve, 1961,” Robert C. Kimball Papers, bMS 368/1 (7-8), Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

<sup>47</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 99.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Demonic” in *The Interpretation of History* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 3.

remind his students that the word “face” derived from the Latin *facias*, which means “making”: “namely, giving a form, making a thing what it is.” The word “person,” meanwhile, was related to the Greek *prosupon*, which means “face” or “appearance,” but which could also mean “mask” – as in the masks of comedy and tragedy in the Greek theatre. The face, or mask, was a good symbol for a dominant and recurring theme of Tillich’s theology: the ambiguous character of all of life’s concrete self-manifestations, both expressing and distorting the deeper, hidden reality of which they are the external representatives, simultaneously giving a form to life and then misrepresenting life. The manifest parts of reality are the faces, the masks of God; the same is true of people and of their faces. “His face is the real form of man,” Tillich said in one his most brilliant, if underappreciated, lectures, “Surface and Depth.” “His face is the real self-manifestation of man’s bodily existence.” And yet the concrete form, the face, the mask, also deceives. Of a man’s face, it is never possible to say, “here we have him, in everything which he could make manifest of himself.” Only, instead, “here we have him, and we have him not.”<sup>49</sup>

If the human face communicates the essence of a person only imperfectly, though, it is nevertheless still a source of fascination, wonder, revelation. In “Surface and Depth,” Tillich went on to reflect on the mysterious quality of the human eye:

The eye has a very special character. If we look [into] the eye of a human being, ... we realize that this is not simply surface, but there the person appears to us in a way in which it doesn’t appear in any other part of the body. It appears so strong that we are not able to look at it for a long time, because the person-to-person encounter becomes too intimate. So it is that the eyes are the places where the hidden reality, below the surface, below the face, below the possible mask, comes out.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Tillich, “Man’s Self-Interpretation: Surface and Depth.”

The eye is the point where reality – in this case, the reality of an individual person – breaks through the ambiguous surface as a revelatory expression and experience. But breakthroughs of this kind are rare; usually, the essences of things do not reveal themselves quite so transparently. Tillich describes the attempt, implied in every attempt to know something or someone, to pierce through the deceiving and changing surface of what one encounters to find the “lasting structures, lasting concepts, lasting laws.” Every attempt at thought and observation “penetrates below the first answer which now appears as superficial, as belonging to the surface alone, to another answer. And perhaps this also soon appears as superficial, as belonging only to the surface. And the next penetration is done. And so on.”<sup>50</sup>

Tillich went on to apply this method of intellectual penetration across the entire field of inquiry: quests after biological, psychological, sociological, and religious knowledge are all attempts to pierce the depths of their respective realms. Characteristically, however, the first illustration he offers of it is the “attempt to know another human being.” When something in another person’s behavior disturbs or confounds us – when “the surface, which we have met once, and expect to meet again, does not appear” – we realize our ignorance of, and separation from, that person’s inner life and reality. From this disappointed expectation, the cognitive desire, the yearning for true knowledge, the reach into the depths, follows. We attempt to break through the various levels of surface-knowledge towards a more basic, a more fundamental level of the personality:

And we are trying to penetrate to the point at which we come to the rock bottom, to the ground, which can never become surface. Because it

<sup>50</sup> Tillich, “Man’s Self-Interpretation: Surface and Depth.”

transcends every manifestation, it never can be grasped directly. And now we believe we have the reality of this person... But maybe it was still not the real ground.

Incredibly, we never fully arrive at the point when we can say, “now we know something about this man, or this woman.” The center of another’s personality – like the center of an historical period, an event, a society, a situation, of life itself – is always ungraspable, unfathomable, hidden to us; its reality is a matter of faith rather than of direct knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

Tillich embodied this approach in his own relationships with personal acquaintances old and new. Rollo May remembered how it was evident in his searching, inquisitive countenance: “I used to notice at times how intently he looked at me or at others. It was an X-ray look, as though he were searching me out—for what? Neither condemning nor approving, he just looked at me as though he realized there were parts of me which he did not yet know.”<sup>52</sup> Yet there was always much that he did know, did see. People who had contact with Tillich, men and women both, remembered the uncanny way his look seemed to open up parts of their personalities of which they themselves had not been previously aware. Not, it should be said, in order to control or to evaluate them coldly, but rather to unite and participate with them, to share in their dilemmas and concerns. His gaze was emphatically male without being the proverbial, objectifying and appraising “male gaze.” May, again: “It gave one the pleasant sensation of *being known* (here the trite phrase does have a specific meaning) better, for that moment, than one knew

<sup>51</sup> Tillich, “Man’s Self-Interpretation: Surface and Depth.”

<sup>52</sup> May, *Paulus*, 31.

oneself.”<sup>53</sup> Tillich’s talent for intensive and intimate eye contact reflected an affinity with the revisionist approaches to psychoanalysis that had been pioneered by the likes of Sandor Ferenczi, in which the analyst faces the patient directly, face-to-face – and in some sense co-participates in the therapeutic encounter – rather than listening to his utterances from a prone position on the couch, as in the orthodox psychoanalytic practice. Even more so, it reflected his engagement with Martin Buber’s concept of the “I-Thou” relationship, in which two human subjects relate to and accept one another as subjects – not as objects, as in the “I-It” relation – and in turn are related to and accepted by an “eternal Thou,” namely God.<sup>54</sup>

In a sermon from his Union years, “Seeing and Hearing,” Tillich elaborated upon this way of seeing: things, animals, concepts, people. The eye, Tillich reminds us, is not only a window into the soul, a medium of self-revelation, but also the organ of sight. And seeing is as ontologically significant as listening. Tillich notes that true sight, loving sight, creative sight – in contrast with the kind of seeing that objectifies, that “violates and separates” – unites the seer with that which is seen. The word “intuition” – a term that comes up frequently in remembrances of Tillich’s personality – means “seeing into.” “It is an intimate seeing,” he writes, “a grasping and being grasped. It is a seeing shaped by love.” What is more, this kind of seeing goes beyond itself and beyond even the objects it sees. “We never see only what we see; we always see something else with it and through it!” If we see a stone, we see

<sup>53</sup> May, *Paulus*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> For Ferenczi, see Andre Haynal, *Disappearing and Reviving: Sandor Ferenczi in the History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2018). For Buber, see Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) and *Martin Buber’s Life and Work*, 3 vols. (Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1983) as well as Buber’s writings themselves, especially *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996).



not only the colors and forms of the stone's visible surface, but "with and through this limited surface we are aware of the roundness, of the extension and mass of the structure of the whole thing." If we see an animal, we see its skin directly, but also "with it and through it we are aware of the tension and power of its muscles, of its inner strivings which are covered as well as revealed by the skin."<sup>55</sup> Tillich deeply admired the paintings of Franz Marc – with their colorful depictions of the straining musculature of bulls and horses and cats – and considered expressionism to be the artistic style best suited to this way of seeing. He referred to his own aesthetic, which was closely related to German expressionism, as "belief-ful realism."<sup>56</sup>

Of course, this "with and throughness" applies also to the human face, that part of the person which presents itself to our vision:

If we look at a human face, we see lines and shades, but with it and through it we see a unique, incomparable personality whose expressions are visible in his face, whose character and destiny have left traces which we understand and in which we can even read something of his future. With and through colors and forms and movements we see friendliness and coldness, hostility and devotion, anger and love, sadness and joy. We see infinitely more than we see when we look into a human face.

Beyond accessing someone's subterranean life or individuality, seeing someone – truly seeing him or her – draws us towards seeing the Holy in them, albeit in an imperfect way. With and through people, things, events, and images we glimpse the ultimate, the unconditional, which never be seen directly, for "It is the light itself and

<sup>55</sup> Paul Tillich, "Seeing and Hearing" in *The New Being*, 128-30.

<sup>56</sup> For a statement of "belief-ful realism," as well as Tillich's aesthetic views more broadly, see Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Henry Holt, 1932). For Tillich's appreciation of Franz Marc, see Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 77.

therefore it is darkness for our eyes.” Tillich’s word for this kind of sight was “contemplation,” for which he provided another useful etymology:

Con-templation means going into the temple, into the sphere of the holy, into the deep roots of things, into their creative ground. We see the mysterious powers which we call beauty and truth and goodness. We cannot see them as such, we can see them only in things and events. We see them with and through the shape of a rose and the movements of the stars and the image of a friend.<sup>57</sup>

This was the impersonal quality that many felt in Tillich’s presence: one born not of coldness or detachment but rather of intimate and mystical connection to a larger, transpersonal unity. An impersonality, in other words, that can only be accessed in the lowest depths of the personal.

### **Cognitive Eros and Tillich’s Ontology of Love**

What is the point of this excursus on Tillich’s theory of faces, of masks, of surfaces and depths, of seeing and listening? Simply to ask the following question: can we, as historians, extend to Tillich – or indeed to any historical subject – the same kind of probing, earnest, sensuous attention that Tillich extended to the people and the intellectual problems he encountered in his own life? Can we attempt to meet Tillich’s earnest, inquisitive gaze, to plumb *his* psychological and spiritual depths as he attempted to do for others? There would seem to be considerable resistance in our field against doing anything of the kind. To apply his approach to concrete historical problems – such as, for instance, Tillich’s own life and person – would likely strike most historians as impractical or, worse, embarrassing. To try to

<sup>57</sup> Tillich, “Seeing and Hearing” in *The New Being*, 129-30.

know someone from the past in the same way as we try to know our intimate friends would seem, to many of us, like a gross category error.

Why is this? Why are contemporary historians so squeamish, as a general rule, about inquiring frankly into individual human depths? Why are we discouraged from thinking our historical subjects *had* such depths? There are several possible answers to this question. One is the understandable desire to grant the people we write about a respectful distance, to steer clear of the love-hate relationships – sometimes bordering on the stalker-like – that biographers often develop with their subjects.<sup>58</sup> Another reason – on the other end of the spectrum – is the discredit that has in recent decades attached itself to psychologically informed approaches to history that have claimed too much objectivity for themselves. The combination of rigidity, scientism, and interpretive outlandishness in mid-twentieth-century psychoanalysis was partly responsible for this backlash; in the 1970s, “psychohistory” acquired a bad name due to its sometimes-mechanical, sometimes-bizarre application of Freudian concepts and diagnoses to historical figures and events.<sup>59</sup> (The best psychohistories, like those by Tillich’s friend and Harvard colleague Erik Erikson, generally avoided such pitfalls.)<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> For a thoughtful reflection on this phenomenon, see Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography” in *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 129-44.

<sup>59</sup> Among the more influential contemporary critiques of psychohistory were Jacques Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History, and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Robert Coles, “Shrinking History,” *New York Times Review of Books*, 20, February 22, 1973 and March 8, 1973, 15-22, 25-9.

<sup>60</sup> See Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1958) and *Gandhi’s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: Norton, 1969).

Yet the correction against these excesses has too often taken the form of denying depth-psychological realities altogether. If historians are not even permitted to suppose the existence and the importance of a rich, strange, and sometime terrifying interior life in our subjects – familiar to us because we know that such things exist in ourselves – then we are in bad shape. A plunge into the depths leads inevitably to an encounter with mystery. And mystery, unfortunately, is an intolerable presence to both the commonsense empiricism and the hip theorizing that pass for philosophy in our guild. As Tillich acknowledged, even the most intrepid inquirer is destined never to grasp the “real ground” of the human person, which is beyond all grasp. Beneath each depth – in an event, in a social structure, and perhaps especially in a person – unfolds yet another depth. The search for bedrock results in the discovery of an abyss. And acknowledging the reality of the abyss is an insult to the positivistic pretensions harbored by some historians and an opening to metaphysical questions that many would prefer to leave to professional philosophers (who are themselves often as loathe to consider them). Such a narrowing and a straightening of historical inquiry should be seen as the provincialism that it is. If an encounter with the abyss is required, then so be it. The abyss may have something valuable to teach us.

Finally, and relatedly, much of contemporary academic culture in the humanities – like the surrounding liberal-professional-managerial culture – trades on a reflexive, knowing, and all-pervasive ironic posture towards most attempts to grapple with unknowability, whether in human motivation or elsewhere. Deflation is the order of the day. Some go so far as to dismiss the entire concept of “depth” as

so much sententiousness and empty intellectual posturing. As with psychoanalysis and its decline, the concern with “depth” among mid-twentieth-century intellectuals probably deserved a critical correction and perhaps even a measure of deflation; there is no question that posturing and sententiousness were and are real enough phenomena. As with the backlash against Freud and psychoanalysis, however, a reasonable skepticism has turned into a habitual and arid suspiciousness that justifiably raises the question of its own unconscious motivation. “Depth effects,” rather than the true depths themselves, have become our most prized intellectual quarry. Why is that?

Consider the following symptomatic passage from the introduction of Mark Greif’s much lauded recent history of midcentury American thought and letters, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*:

After all, what confers the assurance of *depth* in ideas? To some extent, we possess verifiable criteria for depth: complexity, fitness to evidence, originality or unexpectedness, orientation to “first questions,” as well as the latest specialized or recondite ones. But there seem to be further criteria, widely shared, that honor corresponding traits not openly avowable: mystery; appeal to unique intuition (and contact with the ineffable); unknownness, even to the edge of incomprehensibility; and orientation to mortal or primeval concepts (death, time, struggle, will, and limit). The sensibility of depth, rewarded by depth effects, is not entirely alien to the life of the mind. We ordinarily step outside of the discursive system, or systems of thought, when we avow these “depth effects” openly. Yet when it comes to topics like “the human,” as well as some others (conjecturally: those of “the ethical,” “the political,” “the philosophical,” “the humanities,” “God,” “science,” “the natural”), we will need to acknowledge the role of these purposes as a part, even the principal or defining part, of the production, reception, and dissemination of these eminently respectable discourses and their ideas.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Mark Greif, *Age of the Crisis of Man*, 25.

Notice two features of this passage, which teeters uncomfortably close itself to the “edge of incomprehensibility”: first, Grief’s assumption that “mystery,” “unique intuition,” “contact with the ineffable,” and “mortal or primeval concepts” are self-disqualifyingly empty, “not openly avowable.” Second, his complete misunderstanding of what midcentury devotees of depth such as Tillich actually meant by the term. Depth has nothing to do, except perhaps incidentally, with “originality” “complexity,” or “unexpectedness.” Depth has to do with a centeredness not visible on the surface of existence. The depth of an idea is its ability to grasp – or, better, to be grasped by – the most important, and usually occluded, reality of something. To accept that things have depth is to notice the inexhaustible mystery at their heart, as well as our own mystery. This is a serious insight and not, as Grief seems to imply, an invitation to portentousness.

To be drawn toward human depths, shared alike by our subjects and by ourselves, is to be in the power of the cognitive Eros that Tillich saw as the moving force behind every worthwhile attempt towards historical understanding, psychological insight, or philosophical wisdom. Tillich believed that every true act of thinking is rooted in a desire to commune with the objects of our thought. For if the mental life is something other than a detached, sterile process devoted to analysis and organization, bearing little or no connection to the other parts of our being, it must rest upon some point of contact – what the Greeks called *Gnosis* – between the knower and the thing known. We, as historians, forget this dynamic interrelationship with our historical subjects – in the attempt to exempt ourselves from it – at our own peril. As Tillich wrote in his Karen Horney Memorial Lecture in

1962, "Understanding implies participation." This does not mean that temporal, cultural, or geographical distances can be overcome by willed acts of intellection; on the contrary, realistic thought preserves a sense of what distinguishes and separates us from the people and things outside ourselves, past and present. But it does mean that we will never understand anything without a desire to be somehow united with those seemingly alien elements in what we encounter – a desire underwritten by hope that at the deepest level they are in fact estranged parts of the same unity to which we ultimately belong. "No empirical knowledge of the procedures of an African initiation-rite could make it understandable for us if there were not something in which we could participate through basic elements of the human nature," as Tillich writes. "And the most refined philological apparatus for the exegesis of a Greek tragedy could not bestow a knowledge of its meaning without participation and understanding."<sup>62</sup>

What is the name for this ever-unconsummated drive to be united with what we encounter and with what is seemingly alien to us, in the mental life and in general? Tillich, with the backing of centuries of philosophical reflection, calls it love. Among the most important of his many forgotten intellectual contributions, indeed, was this recovery and elaboration of love as an ontological concept, which is to say as a basic category and dynamic in all being *as being*. At the same time, love was for Tillich – as for many Christian thinkers – the foundation of all morality, the supreme ethical criterion and commandment. How are the ontological and the

<sup>62</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Basic Nature of Man," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Karen Horney Memorial Lecture, New York Academy of Medicine, March 29, 1962, PTP, bMS 649/84 (8), 6.

ethical aspects of love related? Tillich delivered his fullest and most cogent treatment of love in his 1953 Firth Lectures at the University of Nottingham, England, later published as *Love, Power, and Justice* (1954); his reflections belonged to a larger midcentury resurgence of interest in love's psychological, sociological, philosophical, and theological implications, evident in such books as Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving* (1956), and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* (1959).<sup>63</sup> This wave of serious reflection and scholarship on love followed behind a somewhat earlier generation of European considerations of love, from a more explicitly religious perspective, in books like Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* (1936), C.S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* (1936), and Denis de Rougement's *Love in the Western World* (1939).<sup>64</sup>

In *Love, Power, and Justice*, Tillich rejected the common understanding of love as an emotional state – although he acknowledged that love is always accompanied by emotion – and defined it instead as a basic element of all being, “the drive towards the unity of the separated.” Love is “the moving power of life,” that force by which “being in actuality,” aims to reunite with itself and thereby to recover its lost unity. Love is the dynamic, reconciliatory drive in all life, be it in cultural productions, in interpersonal relations, in social and communal endeavors, in

<sup>63</sup> Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956); and Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

<sup>64</sup> Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: Westminster Press, 1953); C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Denis de Rougement, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).



artistic creations, or in intellectual pursuits. Because love unites what is estranged, it stands in a polar, interdependent relationship to separation, estrangement, and alienation; the drive towards reunion implies a separateness to be overcome, just as the pain of separation implies a lost original oneness. But unity logically precedes division:

It is impossible to unite that which is essentially separated. Without an ultimate belongingness no union of one thing with another can be conceived. The absolutely strange cannot enter into a communion. But the estranged is striving for reunion. In the loving joy about the 'other one' the joy about one's own self-fulfillment by the other is also present. That which is absolutely strange to me cannot add to my self-fulfillment, it can only destroy me if it touches the sphere of my being. Therefore love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged.

Love is strongest, by this ontological perspective, when it bridges the widest gap of separation; hence, "it is the fulfillment and the triumph of love that it is able to reunite the most radically separated beings, namely individual persons." At the same time, fulfilled love is an ambiguous experience, at once "extreme happiness and the end of happiness. The separation is overcome. But without the separation there is no love and no life."<sup>65</sup>

Pitting his own view against other recent considerations of love – especially that of the Swedish neo-orthodox theologian Anders Nygren – Tillich describes love as essentially one. Nygren, in his book *Eros and Agape*, drew sharp historical and philosophical distinctions between pagan Eros, which he identified with romantic passion, and Christian Agape, or divine love. Tillich similarly distinguished among the different "qualities" of love, and indeed called for even more distinctions within

<sup>65</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 25-6.

“what was commonly comprehended under the name *erōs*.”<sup>66</sup> Eros, properly speaking, was the transpersonal, elevating drive – Plato’s “wings of desire” – toward the beautiful and the true and the good. Philia was the person-to-person aspect of love, the acknowledgement of the other as an independent center of being. Epithymia, or libido, was physical, sexual love. Agape, meanwhile, was the reconciling form of all loves, the unity of the separated, the love that breaks through from the dimension of eternity, the acceptance of the unacceptable. Tillich’s thought, then, was certainly amenable to acknowledging the many varieties of love. But he suspected a moralistic intent behind Nygren’s mutually exclusive categorizations and instead saw the different qualities of love as belonging to and participating in one another. Agape was not the negation of Eros or *epithymia*, but rather their fulfillment.<sup>67</sup>

Here was a subtle, but unmistakable, expression of Tillich’s personal sensuality. Even simple “desire,” “libido,” or *epithymia* – what is usually impugned as the “lowest” quality of love – is for Tillich an instance’s of life’s legitimate striving for “that of which it is in want,” for “union with that which is separated from it, though it belongs to it.”<sup>68</sup> Libidinal desires are capable of perversion if and when they fixated on pleasure for pleasure’s sake rather than on the natural act of reunion and self-fulfillment. But they are not in themselves wrong. On the contrary, such vital

<sup>66</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 28.

<sup>67</sup> For Tillich’s argument with Nygren, see Alexander Irwin, *Eros Towards the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 19-31.

<sup>68</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 29.

and bodily needs were very often the means by which the putatively “higher” forms of love – Eros, Philia, and Agape – could realize and instantiate themselves.

One of the central aims of *Love, Power, and Justice* was to demonstrate the final unity of those three concepts – love, power, and justice – once purged of definitional confusions and distortions. Love and power are not exclusive of one another but rather mutually constitutive; love without power, in fact, dissolves into sentimentality, which is something less than love. Power without love or justice becomes domination, which is less than true power, the power that is rooted in Being. And justice without power or love becomes either feckless or legalistic. Tillich’s philosophy of power was heavily influenced by Nietzsche’s concept of the “will to power,” which he interpreted as the “dynamic self-affirmation of life,” the “drive of everything living to realize itself with increasing intensity and extensity,” someone or something’s capacity to assert its own power of being in spite of internal and external resistance, i.e. the non-being within and outside itself. Tillich pointed to Jean-Paul Sartre and Arnold Toynbee as “phenomenologists” of power who analyzed its subtle dynamics among individuals and groups. A brief glance between two strangers on the street contains a thousand subtle expressions and negotiations of power. Power, like love, is an inescapable ingredient of all individual, interpersonal, group, and religious life. Tillich disliked the term “power politics” because of its pejorative redundancy; all politics is always the exercise of power.<sup>69</sup>

Power, moreover, has an inescapably coercive and compulsory element. How, then, can it be united with love? Since a being is powerful in the degree to

<sup>69</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 35-45.

which it accepts and conquers non-being – within and outside itself – and since love is the process by which non-being and estrangement are overcome, “Love is the foundation, not the negation, of power.” Tillich revived a phrase from Luther – “love’s strange work” – that captured this seeming paradox. While the “proper work” of love is sweetness, self-surrender, and mercy, its “strange work,” according to Luther (and Tillich), lies in bitterness, killing, and condemnation. Both, however, are works of love:

What [Luther] meant could be expressed in the statement that it is the strange work of love to destroy what is against love. This, however, presupposes the unity of love and power. Love, in order to exercise its proper works, namely charity and forgiveness, must provide for a place on which this can be done, through its strange work of judging and punishing. In order to destroy what is against love, love must be united with power, and not only with power, but also with compulsory power.

Tillich’s Christian realist politics, his otherworldly morality, and his sexual kinks are all present in this statement. Although he acknowledged that this interpretation of love was certainly susceptible to abuse by those in power, he did not flinch from its full implications. In *Love, Power, and Justice*, he speaks of murder trials and executions during the Middle Ages in which the families of the victims fell on their knees and prayed for the soul of the murderers, an act showing that “the destruction of his bodily existence was not felt as a negation, but as an affirmation of love.”<sup>70</sup>

In view of the “strange work of love,” the ethical commandment to “love thy neighbor,” becomes a highly complex, ambiguous, and unsentimental responsibility, the particular contents and dictates of which can only be known from within a concrete situation – as a result of immediate encounters of one power with another

<sup>70</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 49-50.

– and which may, at times, appear to contradict love’s “proper work” of sweetness, kindness, and mercy. “One never knows *a priori* what the outcome of an encounter of power with power will be,” wrote Tillich. “If one judges such an encounter and its outcome according to previous power proportions, one is necessarily unjust, even if one is legally right.” *Love, Power, and Justice* contains a partial apology for hierarchical, proportional, or, as Tillich calls them, “tributive” forms of justice – like those famously prescribed by Aristotle – which assign “tribute” in proportion to an individual being’s intrinsic virtue or “power of being.” This is what Tillich calls “calculating justice,” the kind of justice which “measure[s] the power of being of all things in terms of what shall be given to them or of what shall be withheld from them.” Law is an attempt to codify such proportional or tributive justice.<sup>71</sup>

Law and calculating justice, however, are ultimately transcended by what Tillich calls “creative justice,” the justice that overflows, that joyfully bursts through inherited laws, norms, rules, and forms: justice infused with love. Creative justice is the aim of what Tillich elsewhere called the “transmoral conscience.” It is known in the paradoxical experience of love as *agape*: forgiveness, grace, abundance, free gifts, what he called, in one of his sermons, “Holy waste.”<sup>72</sup> Forgiveness numinously transforms curses into blessings, sinners into righteous ones, weakness into power, injustice into justice. Where does it come from? For Tillich, it is divine justice, revelation, bursting into the realm of temporality from the dimension of eternity, which is not outside of reality but is rather reality’s deepest ground – and abyss.

<sup>71</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 63-4.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Transmoral Conscience,” in *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 136-49; Tillich, “Holy Waste” in *The New Being*, 46-7.

God, symbolically speaking, “is not bound to the given proportion between merit and tribute. He can creatively change the proportion, and does it in order to fulfill those who according to proportional justice would be excluded from fulfillment. Therefore the divine justice can appear as plain injustice.” In the same way that revelation simultaneously cancels and actualizes reason, so creative justice is at once the destruction and the fulfillment of the calculating justice embodied in the law. Because creative justice reconciles the maximally estranged – namely, those persons or beings who by their own guilt, anxiety, and emptiness have become cut off from the rest of Being – it is, Tillich concludes, “the form of reuniting love.”<sup>73</sup>

This idea of love – and its relation to power and justice – is unlikely to gain currency in the secular academic or intellectual world any time soon. Yet Tillich’s philosophical recovery and renewal of love is a necessary resource for our sterile contemporary academic culture, which together with the wider culture identifies love with sentimental emotion or romantic passion and on this basis largely excludes it from the life of the mind. For Tillich’s concept of love applies no less to the cognitive realm than it does to the communal, the interpersonal, or the religious realms; indeed, it is the foundation of all cognitive activity. The relative neglect of this aspect of Tillich’s thought is particularly frustrating in view of the exaggerated attention that his sexual and romantic life received in the aftermath of his wife’s tell-all memoir. Tillich dreaded the possibility of his personal life being exposed and once told a friend that he wanted his private correspondence burned so that he

<sup>73</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 64-6.

would be “remembered as a systematic theologian and not just as a lover.”<sup>74</sup> Tillich’s wife Hannah did in fact burn the letters between Tillich and his lovers, but her revealing book more or less caused his fear to come to pass: his love life is much better known than his thought. Hopefully it is now possible now to understand the two in concert; for if he was right, the deepest thought is always rooted in the deepest love.

### **Young Man Tillich**

The past, as Tillich knew, is the depth of the present. “In every cell of our body, in every trait of our face, in every movement of our soul,” as Tillich wrote, “our past is the present.” Tillich believed that depth psychology had brought the haunting, recurring, and determining character of the past – not only the world-historical past, but also the intimate past of childhood experiences, foundational traumas, and family tragedies played out over generations – to the awareness of modern western culture:

Few periods knew more about the continuous working of the past in the present than ours. We know about the influence of childhood experiences on our character. We know about the scars left by events in early years. We have rediscovered what the Greek tragedians and the Jewish prophets knew, that the past is present in us, both as a curse and as a blessing.

But unlike psychoanalysis – which tended to emphasize curses in the individual’s past over blessings and which aimed, at best, towards a rational-stoical awareness of those curses and a kind of wary truce with them – Tillich believed it was possible

<sup>74</sup> Ann Belford Ulanov, “Between Anxiety and Faith: The Role of the Feminine in Tillich’s Theological Thought” in Jacquelyn Ann K. Kegley, ed., *Paul Tillich on Creativity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 142.

actually to heal the past. But only through forgiveness, what might be thought of as divine love for the past:

Only a blessing that lies above the conflict of blessing and curse can heal. It is the blessing that changes what seems to be unchangeable—the past. It cannot change the facts; what has happened has happened and remains so in all eternity! But the *meaning* of the facts can be changed by the eternal, and the name of this change is the experience of “forgiveness.” If the meaning of the past is changed by forgiveness, its influence on the future is also changed.<sup>75</sup>

We historians, who traffic in the past professionally even as we must live with it personally, might ask ourselves how much or how little of our work has this kind of redemptive aim as its motivating purpose. Do we attempt to commune creatively with the past, or are we merely its cold vivisectionists? Before the past can be redeemed, it must be sympathetically understood. To plumb the individual and psychological depths of Tillich as a mature man and thinker, then, it is necessary to excavate his past – and above all, the formative past of his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Without the benefit of a living and responsive interlocutor, and with full awareness of the potential dangers of the enterprise, we must undertake history in the spirit of psychotherapy.

Tillich was born in 1886 in Starzeddel, a village then in eastern Brandenburg and now just beyond the border in Poland. The first night of the infant Paul’s life was, as his father put it in a letter to his own parents, a “death struggle” that lasted over seven hours and during which he seemed to have died several times.<sup>76</sup> Tillich’s father Johannes, a minister and an official of the German Lutheran Church, was a

<sup>75</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Eternal Now” in *The Eternal Now*, 127, 129.

<sup>76</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 1-2.



stern and patriarchal figure against whose authority and image Tillich bridled throughout his whole life. His mother, Mathilde Durselen, was more liberal and came from a prosperous Rhineland family. Like the title character from Thomas Mann's novel *Tonio Kroger* – and indeed like Mann himself – Tillich was temperamentally divided between a serious, authoritarian father from Prussia and a zestful, warm, and artistic, albeit strict, Rhenish mother.<sup>77</sup> When Tillich was four, Johannes was made a superintendent of schools in another Brandenburg village, Schoenfiess, on the Elbe River: a position that gave him roughly the status of a bishop.

The Tillich household was close-knit, bourgeois, and clerical: at once nurturing and suffocating. Tillich later reflected that “a part of my life belongs to the nineteenth century,” a period towards which he harbored an enduring “longing for its stability, its liberalism, its unbroken cultural traditions” – immediately alongside a sense of its “aesthetic ugliness and spiritual disintegration.”<sup>78</sup> His youth was a period of what he called “dreaming innocence,” a state of happiness and conceit unruffled as yet by consciousness of conflict or ambiguity. Johannes Tillich loved the German musical tradition, and the Tillich house was filled with the sounds of chamber music performances and the piano-playing of Paul's two younger sisters, Johanna and Elizabeth. Both Starzeddel and Schoenfeiss were medieval towns – of “a decidedly rustic character” – with livestock regularly being led through the streets, neat yards and gardens attached to houses, and no railroad connections until Tillich

<sup>77</sup> For the contrast between his parents, and its effect on his later temperament, see Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (London: Collins, 1967), 13-15.

<sup>78</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 3.

was a teenager. Schoenfeiss was surrounded by medieval walls, atop which the minister's son and his friends used to walk for hours. The family was not especially wealthy, and Paul's school friends were for the most part bourgeois or working class, but Johannes's position put Paul into regular contact with the children of Junker elites, lending an aristocratic tinge to his upbringing.<sup>79</sup>

Tillich later reflected that the picturesque environment of his early youth "may partly account for what has been challenged as the romantic trend in my feeling and thinking." In the first place, it imbued him with a sense of mystical connection to the natural world – "a predominantly aesthetic-meditative attitude toward nature as distinguished from a scientific-analytical or technical-controlling relation" – that never left him, even when later as an adult he lived mostly in cities and feared "zerpents."<sup>80</sup> "Nearly all the great memories and longings of my life," he wrote in his autobiography *On the Boundary*, "are interwoven with landscapes, soil, weather, the fields of grain and the smell of the potato plant in autumn, the shapes of clouds, and with wind, flowers and woods."<sup>81</sup> Trees had a special significance for Tillich; he used tell his students, somewhat mischievously, that he still partly believed in nymphs, sprites, and other pagan deities of the woods and forest.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, the antique, cobblestoned villages of Tillich's youth gave him a feeling of personal connection to the past and especially to the medieval European past. In the center of Schoenfiess stood the giant Gothic cathedral, where in liturgies,

<sup>79</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 15-20; Tillich, "Autobiographical Reflections," 4.

<sup>80</sup> Tillich, "Autobiographical Reflections," 4.

<sup>81</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), ,

sacraments, sacred music, and other religious-aesthetic experiences Tillich had his earliest encounters with what he (along with his colleague and mentor Rudolf Otto) would call “the Holy.”<sup>83</sup>

The Church, however, was also associated for Tillich with his father’s overbearing authority, which “made every attempt at autonomous thinking an act of religious daring and connected criticism of authority with a sense of guilt.”<sup>84</sup>

Johannes was, in his son’s words, “a conscientious, very dignified, completely convinced and, in the presence of doubt, angry supporter of the conservative Lutheran point of view.”<sup>85</sup> Paul was not allowed to hop or skip in front of his father. One of Tillich’s earliest memories was of watching his father reading from the light of a dangling kerosene lamp. It was shortly before Christmas, and the soft, flickering outline of the light on the ceiling caused the child Paul to exclaim that he had seen the Christ Child in the dancing pattern of sunlike rays. The steadfastly orthodox Johannes, to whom such sightings were at best poetic fancy – at worst pietistic heresy – pounced on his five-year-old son with “fierce words,” forcing the boy “to call what had been my innermost truth a lie.” “But in my heart,” Tillich later told his wife, “I knew better. Truth was hidden deeper than my father’s anger could reach.”<sup>86</sup>

Johannes spoke very precisely and gave the appearance of complete self-certainty; at one theological congress, he astonished his ministerial colleagues by

<sup>83</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 6. See Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

<sup>84</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 8.

<sup>86</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 13.

confidently declaring, “Nothing can happen to us, we are prepared for everything.”<sup>87</sup> But he was also charming and witty, an engaging storyteller and a soulful intellect. Believing, in the orthodox fashion, that there could be no contradiction between biblical revelation and a true philosophy, Johannes tutored his son in Latin and from an early age engaged him in long, intense conversations about classical philosophy and Christianity. It was in the midst of these colloquies, which Tillich remembered as belonging to “the most happy instances of a positive relation to my father,” that Tillich also got his first taste of intellectual independence. Instinctively understanding that “there was only one point at which resistance was possible—namely, by using the very principles established by my father’s authoritarian system against this system itself,” the son experienced a “breakthrough,” which in time spread to his personal life as well. Johannes, for his part, was not unaware of his son’s nascent intellectual talent, and experienced it as both pride and threat.<sup>88</sup>

The family took annual vacations to the Baltic Sea, which the young Tillich experienced as “the great event, the flight into the open, into unrestricted space”: an escape from the looming attentions of his parents at home and the bureaucratic rigidities of life in a small frontier town. It was during one of these visits to the sea, when Tillich was eight years old, that the concept of the infinite first grasped him – with a force that overpowered him and that sustained his subsequent interest in philosophical problems. The seaside became for Tillich a symbol of “the infinite bordering on the finite”; throughout his life he was captivated by the ocean’s

<sup>87</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 8.

“dynamic assault on the serene firmness of the land and the ecstasy of its gales and waves.”<sup>89</sup> It was at the coast, too, that Tillich experienced one of his earliest erotic fixations: when an unconventional friend of his mother’s took off her shoes to walk sensuously on the beach, the sight of her bare feet aroused both Johannes’s consternation and, perhaps not unrelatedly, young Paul’s fascination. (The memory, along with who knows what else, later rendered him something of a foot fetishist.)<sup>90</sup>

Tillich’s mother Mathilde was the center of his world. She was a quiet, beautiful woman who in photographs exudes a sense of power and calm. Family friends surmised that, her husband’s patriarchal affectations notwithstanding, she was in fact the true power of the family.<sup>91</sup> Paul’s relationship with her was intense, warm, and secretive; one of his favorite places was the kitchen, where he lingered for hours as his mother did housework.<sup>92</sup> As an adult, he almost entirely omitted Mathilde from his memoirs; consequently, not very much is known about her. But it is clear that this reticence stemmed from pain, or possibly evasiveness, rather than from indifference. From childhood well into his teenage years, the two had a “joke” that he would one day marry her. As the oldest child and only son of the family, he was doted on, spoiled, and generally made a boy-king by his mother; but she also made him feel entirely dependent upon her. Tillich’s later writings are full of seemingly autobiographical references to the ambiguity of motherly love, often

<sup>89</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 18. Although the experience itself occurred during his childhood, Tillich drew the connection between his trips to the ocean and his later religious feeling only a few years after Sigmund Freud’s famous description of the “oceanic feeling” – the sensation of oneness and indissoluble bond with the external world – in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930).

<sup>90</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 95-6.

<sup>91</sup> May, *Paulus*, 37.

<sup>92</sup> Jerald Brauer, introduction to Paul Tillich, *The Future of Religions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), [xxi].

concealing a hidden will to dominate. One of his recurring dreams: "My mother kept me dancing on a coin." When as an adult he related this dream to Johannes, the latter burst into tears, suggesting that the father was partly aware of the threatening intimacy between his wife and son.<sup>93</sup>

Paul was considered to be the promising talent of the family, and was widely expected to follow his father's path into the ministry. From an early age, he attended the Lutheran church school and was thoroughly immersed in intensive study of both Old and New Testaments. At the age of twelve, he was sent to board and attend the humanistic *Gymnasium* in Königsberg-Neumark; at fourteen he was enrolled at another *Gymnasium* in Berlin, where his father had been transferred. The formal rigors of humanistic education in Germany at the time included several hours of daily study in ancient languages. Tillich supplemented this regimen with personal reading in modern philosophy (Kant and Fichte were early loves) and literature (he went through a stage when he identified, "almost dangerously," with the title character of *Hamlet*). "The specific mood, the color as it were, of certain weeks or months of my life," he wrote later, "would be determined by one literary work or the other."<sup>94</sup>

Tillich developed a rich fantasy life during his adolescence: "I withdrew as often as possible into imaginary worlds which seemed to be truer than the world outside."<sup>95</sup> At the family's house in Berlin, in the Neunbergerstrasse, there was a walled garden where he and his sisters would play contentedly for hours on end.

<sup>93</sup> May, *Paulus*, 61.

<sup>94</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 24.

Tillich later reflected in a letter to his father that the garden was “a world—a whole world of bliss and innocence untouched by reality.”<sup>96</sup> In accord with the pervasive influence of Prussian militarism among his social class, he delighted in “uniforms, parades, maneuvers, history of battles, and ideas of strategy” – an enthusiasm that was only ended for him by the battlefield horrors of World War I. He took joy in building and decorating miniature worlds; for a time he harbored the ambition to become an architect. At the family’s trips to the beach, he would construct giant, elaborate sandcastles – a pastime he never gave up even in adulthood. In time, however, “that romantic imagination was transformed into philosophical imagination,” allowing him to “combine categories, to perceive abstractions in concrete terms (I would almost say ‘in color’) and to experiment with a wide range of conceptual possibilities.”<sup>97</sup>

Tillich’s mother died of cancer when he was seventeen. At the time of her death, he wrote a poem commemorating his sense of anguish and existential disorientation:

Am I then I? who tells me that I am!  
 Who tells me what I am, what I shall become?  
 What is the world’s and what life’s meaning?  
 What is being and passing away on earth?

O abyss without ground, dark depth of madness!  
 Would that I had never gazed upon you and were sleeping like a child! <sup>98</sup>

The “abyss” would remain an important concept and motif in Tillich’s thought, as the loss of his mother remained the defining event of his youth. Some of his closest

<sup>96</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> May, *Paulus*, 41.

friends believed that it stunted him, trapping him within the preoccupations and longings of his seventeen-year-old self. Of Tillich's mother, the Paucks comment that, "He sought her forever after in every Demeter or Persephone he pursued."<sup>99</sup>

In the near-term, this meant that he transferred his affections to the elder of his two younger sisters, Johanna. Their relationship became the new secretive and mystical connection in his life; she used to play Grieg on the piano for him for hours while he studied or wrote. In the care of their father, who after his wife's death was grief-stricken and often preoccupied, the children were neglected; their appearance to outsiders was tired, pale, and often shabbily dressed.<sup>100</sup> Mathilde's death also intensified the conflicts between father and son, which at this time still took a purely intellectual guise. "In order for the maternal side of my makeup to express itself," Tillich later remembered, "outbreaks, often extreme, were necessary." Karl Barth – the great theologian of neo-orthodoxy – later told Tillich that he seemed as though he was doing perennial battle with the Grand Inquisitor; Tillich admitted there was some truth in this observation.<sup>101</sup> Throughout his life he had a recurring anxious dream in which he was lecturing to a roomful of divinity students in clerical collars, all with his father's face.<sup>102</sup> In another dream, he was being pursued by his father and climbed to the top of a tree in the garden of his family's house; the dream ended when his father's arm reached out to grab him and pull him down.

<sup>99</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, .

<sup>101</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 40-1.

<sup>102</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 14.



Yet Tillich also loved his father, who for all his sternness and self-conscious dignity was also capable of tenderness and whose domineering manner was intermittently visible as the result of an inner weakness. One last dream by Tillich of his father: the two men met and passed on the street, and Paulus turned around to see his father looking at him with watery blue eyes, an expression which for some reason caused the younger Tillich to shriek and convulse with terror. The love and even protectiveness he felt toward Johannes made Paulus's struggles to escape orthodoxy and parental authority all the more painful. If it is true, as Rollo May put it, that Tillich ultimately "won the oedipal battle with his father," it is also true that the conflict saddled him with a feeling of guilt and a permanent sense that "new knowledge can be won only by breaking a taboo."

In a deeply autobiographical passage from one of his sermons of the 1950s, "Where Are My Mothers and Brothers," Tillich expanded upon Jesus's shocking advice to the disciples that they should "hate" their families if filial devotion interfered with their discipleship:

We must risk tragic guilt in becoming free from father and mother and brothers and sisters. And we know today better than many generations before us what that means, how infinitely difficult it is and that nobody does it without carrying scars in his soul his whole life. For it is not only the real father or mother or brother or sister from whom we must become free in order to come into our own. It is something much more refined, the image of them, from which our earliest childhood has impregnated our souls.<sup>103</sup>

In his autobiography, Tillich reflected that the arguments with his father meant that

every theological, ethical, and political criticism encountered inner obstacles that were overcome only after lengthy struggles. This heightened for me the significance, seriousness, and weight of such insights. When I would belatedly arrive at a conclusion that had long since become commonplace to

<sup>103</sup> Tillich, "Where Are My Mothers and Brothers," in *The New Being*, 108.

the average intelligence, it still seemed to me to be shocking and full of revolutionary implications.

“Free-wheeling intelligence” – what he later referred to as “autonomy” – was thus suspect to Tillich. But then so, too, was dogmatic authority, submission to hierarchical religious law, what he called “heteronomy”: “when a historical religion is cloaked with the unconditional validity of the divine, as when a book, person, community, institution or doctrine claims absolute authority and demands the submission of every other reality.” It was in the midst of his attempts to synthesize and navigate between these two perspectives that Tillich hit upon the concept of “theonomy,” a form of culture and symbolism that attempts to point *towards* the ultimately sublime and significant without claiming ultimacy for itself.<sup>104</sup>

Upon graduating from the *Gymnasium* in 1904, at the age of eighteen, Tillich began his theological and philosophical study: first in two semester-long stints at the Universities of Berlin and Tübingen, and then for two full years at the University of Halle. The theological liberalism in ascendency while Tillich received his academic training already represented a departure from his father’s conservative Lutheranism, but it was nevertheless contained within the intellectual assumptions of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie; further upheavals were yet to come. Academic life at German universities at the time was highly individualistic and dominated by the student corporations. At Halle, Tillich joined the Wingolf Society, a Christian fraternity in which he became a leader and through which he met many of his closest friends. Wingolf was among the wave of newer “free” student

<sup>104</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 37-40.

organizations that abstained from dueling and the other archaic customs of the older, corps-like *Studentenverbindungen*.<sup>105</sup> Largely apolitical, its main orientation was Christian fellowship: members took long rambles through the countryside, stayed awake discussing intellectual and personal problems into the small hours of the morning, and engaged in a moderate amount of drunken revelry. (Preserved among Tillich's papers is an arrest report from his university days for "drunken singing".)<sup>106</sup> In a letter to Thomas Mann that later became the basis for parts of the latter's *Doctor Faustus*, Tillich reflected that sense of community he experienced in his fraternity still struck him as "the most important episode of my life."<sup>107</sup>

Maintaining a culture of buttoned-up sexual propriety, Wingolf was also the source of a chastity vow that Tillich kept, with considerable difficulty, until 1914 when he was married to Grethi Weaver, the daughter of a family friend.<sup>108</sup>

When World War I broke out in August 1914, Tillich was twenty-eight years old, recently married, and fresh from a two-year, somewhat unsuccessful stint as a minister at an urban, working-class parish in Berlin. (The workers had no idea what to make of his intellectual, highly spiritualized ethics and preaching.) Like many

<sup>105</sup> Eugene McCarragher places a heavy emphasis on the Wingolf Society as a source of Tillich's later sexual misbehavior. "In Wingolf," McCarragher writes, "Christian love merged with a strong will to power, as male friendship both draped itself in military regalia and mandated the exclusion of women from all but festive occasions." He writes that "The tension within Tillich's work between the ideal of 'religious eros' and a reluctance to set rules for the erotic life had roots in the gendered Christian community of Tillich's fraternity." McCarragher, *Christian Critics*, 122. As a non-dueling society, however, Wingolf was significantly less prone to the militaristic bellicosity and masculine power-worship that pervaded many other German fraternities at the time. Its primary orientation was rather Christian fellowship and intellectual exchange. On student life in Wilhelmine Germany, see Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>106</sup> "Police report for disturbing the peace with loud singing," June 27, 1905, PTP, bMS 649/222 (6).

<sup>107</sup> Paul Tillich to Thomas Mann, May 23, 1943, PTP, bMS 649/164.

<sup>108</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 39.

other idealistic bourgeois German youth of the time, he was swept up in the wave of nationalistic fervor that accompanied the outbreak of the war; he enlisted in the army as a chaplain and served in the Fourth Artillery Regiment of the Seventh Reserve Division from 1914 until January 1919. Tillich went to war buoyed up by a confident, optimistic religious liberalism; his sermons from this period were earnest appeals to God, king, duty, and fatherland. He later wrote of himself and his fellow soldiers that “most of them shared the popular belief in a nice God who would make everything turn out for the best.”<sup>109</sup>

In fact everything turned out for the worst; Tillich’s almost prototypically miserable and traumatic experience on the western front of the war – trenches, mud, rats, disease, carnage – showed him the unimaginable depths of suffering and cruelty that were possible in life and that put an end to any naïve or easy religious providentialism. He returned from the war a “wild man.” But although the experience of modern war shook him to his foundations – he suffered two nervous breakdowns, one of them during the Battle of Verdun – it did not destroy him mentally or spiritually as it did to many others.<sup>110</sup> Amid the “unbelievable destruction” of battle, he clung to the famous hymn from Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything

<sup>109</sup> Tillich, “Powers and Principalities,” in *The New Being*, 52.

<sup>110</sup> Tillich was extremely reticent in speaking about these episodes, and the Paucks also treat them very discreetly, speaking only of Tillich’s “nerves” having “failed him.” Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 49-54. Today we would almost certainly say that Tillich suffered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The literature on shell-shock and other nervous ailments of World War I is large. See, especially, Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000) and Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.” These words, Tillich later wrote, proved stronger than the sounds “of exploding shells, of weeping at open graves, of the sighs of the sick, of the moaning of the dying” and gave him the confidence that no power, no creature, no force, however powerful, could “destroy the *meaning* of our lives even if they can destroy our lives. And this gives us the certainty that no creature can destroy the meaning of life universal, in nature as well as history, of which we are a part, even though history and the whole universe should destroy themselves tomorrow.”<sup>111</sup>

It was during the war years that Tillich was first introduced to the glories of painting and the visual arts, partly as a respite from the ugliness and boredom of life at the front. He bought a series of cheap reproductions at a military bookstore and privately began a systematic study of the history of art. On a furlough from his army service in Berlin, he had a revelatory religious experience in front of Botticelli’s “Madonna with Singing Angels,” a painting which he always thereafter took as a consummate symbol of the erotic and feminine aspects of divinity. Around the same time, his friend Eckart von Sydow, who later became an art historian, introduced him to the expressionist styles of the secessionist painters then challenging the conventions of bourgeois academic art in Germany. These experiences opened Tillich’s eyes to “how the substance of a work of art could destroy form and to the creative ecstasy implied in this process.” Thereafter, the concept of the “breakthrough” was central to Tillich’s theory of revelation: the immediate demands

<sup>111</sup> Tillich, “Principalities and Powers,” in *The New Being*, 58.

of love or justice in a concrete situation bursting through the older forms, laws, customs, etc.<sup>112</sup>

Another major influence upon Tillich during the war years was Nietzsche. Tillich was like many of the other German youths who carried copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* with them in their knapsacks on the way to war, imagining Nietzsche to be a paragon of idealistic German nationalism, only to discover in his writings unanswerable challenges to the proud, bourgeois order they were supposedly fighting for. The nightmarish experiences in the trenches only confirmed the critique. When a female friend from home sent Tillich a photograph of herself picnicking on a lawn in a white dress, he responded that he found it impossible to believe that such a thing still existed.<sup>113</sup> After the war, he resolved never again to deny himself the sensual pleasures that had been forbidden from him by his sheltered upbringing and his Wingolfite vow of chastity. He adopted as his own Nietzsche's critique of modern, bourgeois Christianity for its failure to ecstatically affirm life, joy, and the body. He treasured Zarathustra's roundelay: "The world is deep,/and deeper than the day could read./Deep is its woe—/Joy—deeper still than grief can be:/Woe saith, 'Hence! Go!'/But joys all want eternity/Want deep profound eternity!"<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 27-8; Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 76.

<sup>113</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (Logos Publishing, [1910] 2017), 130-1. In his sermon "The Depth of Existence," Tillich quotes the roundelay and describes Nietzsche as "a man who, in passionate striving for the depth, was caught by destructive forces and did not know the word to conquer them." Tillich, "The Depth of Existence," in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 63. On Tillich's use of Nietzsche, compared with that of Walter Kaufmann, see Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 228-9.

Tillich returned from the war a self-described “barbarian.”<sup>115</sup> The dissolution of the German army, the civil unrest that was roiling the home front, and the economic suffering that he observed as a result of the war left him with a sense that the world of his youth was irrevocably, and perhaps deservedly, lost. He also discovered that his wife, Grethi, had become pregnant by one of his best friends, Richard “Dox” Wegner; in 1919 she gave birth to Wegner’s child and shortly thereafter deserted Tillich. Grethi was a beautiful and unconventional woman who expressed open contempt for Tillich’s desire for sexual monogamy within their marriage. Despite the angst occasioned by this turn of events, Tillich did not begrudge either his wife or his friend, who in spite of general expectation did marry one another. Grethi raised the child alone.<sup>116</sup> In later years, Tillich rarely talked about the marriage, but continued to idealize his first wife and to claim that the marriage never would have ended in divorce if it had been up to him. Once, during the late 1950s, he and his secretary were going through old boxes in his office when a photograph of Grethi surfaced; his secretary noticed that he took a sharp intake a breath and was visibly overtaken with emotion.<sup>117</sup> “He who can endure the loneliness of disappointed love without bitterness experiences the depth of man’s predicament radically and creatively”; Tillich probably wrote these words about his first marriage, although his second marriage certainly also qualified as an instance of disappointed love.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 56.

<sup>116</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 79-81.

<sup>117</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Tillich, “Solitude and Loneliness,” in *The Eternal Now*, 3.

From 1919 to 1924, Tillich lived in Berlin. The impression made by the great metropolis, he later remembered, was similar to that of the sea: “infinity, openness, unrestricted space!”<sup>119</sup> Berlin, he later wrote, was for him a “religious symbol,” at once “homeland and mythos.”<sup>120</sup> Tillich was a lifelong urban flâneur and bon vivant. His attraction to the city, he reflected, “saved me from a romantic rejection of technical civilization and taught me to appreciate the importance of the city for the development of the critical side of intellectual and artistic life.”<sup>121</sup> But beyond this, it was “the dynamic character of life in Berlin that affected me, the immense amount of traffic, the masses of people, the ever-changing scenes, the inexhaustible possibilities.”<sup>122</sup> Among those, of course, were erotic possibilities. And unlike in earlier times, before his first marriage, there was now the possibility of fulfillment. Tillich’s wife Hannah later reflected that the city meant, for him, “anonymity and voyeurism in streets full of desirable crowds, sitting in cafes writing his papers, watching the girls go by, meeting over a sherry, being in the world.” Tillich had a running joke with his friends and his wife that Berlin, for him, was the city of “10,000 women’s legs!”<sup>123</sup>

After the prolonged repression of his adolescence and the enforced asceticism of the war years, Tillich along with many other Weimar intellectuals threw himself into the city’s cultural, intellectual, social, and sexual maelstrom. It was a period of explosive cultural experimentation: Brechtian theater, expressionist

<sup>119</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 7.

<sup>120</sup> Tillich, “Frontiers” in *The Future of Religions*, 55; “Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 57.

<sup>121</sup> Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 7.

<sup>123</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 115.



painting and film, roisterous nightlife, feminism, contraception, psychoanalysis. But also of economic suffering and political extremism: the Spartacist uprising of 1919, hyperinflation, extreme poverty, and the emergence of radical politics on the Right and the Left.<sup>124</sup> Also present in this vibrant cultural stew was the massive grief and trauma of the First World War. Tillich presided over a group, which also included the Jewish mystic and philosopher Martin Buber, calling itself the *Kairos Circle*, that attempted to forge a philosophy of “religious socialism” capable of navigating between the seemingly obsolete bourgeois nationalism of the German Protestant churches and the militant secularism of the working-class political parties (the SPD and the KPD).<sup>125</sup> He read a good deal of Rilke and Stefan George. He and his poet and artist friends had endless conversations about the mystical, the demonic, and the erotic. He rented out rooms in his Taunusstrasse apartment – known affectionately to his friends as the *Katastrophen-Diele*, or Disaster Bar – to struggling artists and students.<sup>126</sup>

Tillich referred to this period of his life as one of “creative chaos.” He had broken decisively with his family and his repressed childhood, and the glimmering, seething metropolis simultaneously beckoned him and threatened to engulf him. Still haunted by the war, he could never return to the repression of his youth; it had

<sup>124</sup> Of the many excellent works about the culture of Weimar Berlin, see especially Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>125</sup> On the Kairos circle, see Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 33-6; Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 70-75; Ronald H. Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), 46-53; and Terrence O'Keefe, “Paul Tillich's Marxism,” *Social Research* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 472-99.

<sup>126</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 79.

been, he later wrote, a “puritan form of self-control” that “excluded elements of the self which have a just claim to be admitted to the general balance of strivings.”

Equally problematic, however, was the “romantic or open type of self-control” with its “chaotic admittance of all strivings”; such a chaotic life “makes a balanced centre impossible and dissolves the self into a process of disconnected impulses.”<sup>127</sup> Tillich sought a way through this impasse in psychoanalysis; but this, too, proved less than satisfactory. Among the borders at his apartment was the psychoanalyst Christian Hermann, who performed a brief analysis on Tillich that the latter put an abrupt halt to because he feared it would rob him of his generative power.<sup>128</sup>

It was amid the atmosphere of postwar cultural decadence and desperate gaiety that Tillich met and wooed his second wife, Hannah Werner, the woman who would become his life companion, his personal touchstone amid numerous affairs and conflicts, and, ultimately, the posthumous ruiner of his reputation. Hannah was, in Tillich’s own view if not necessarily in reality, the solution to the problem of his relation to the opposite sex, the only woman capable of loving him, accepting him, and reclaiming him even after and amid his many adventures with other women. The pair met at a Mardi Gras ball given by the Academy of Art in Berlin in 1920. Hannah was ten years Tillich’s junior, the daughter of a school superintendent and an art teacher in a suburb of Berlin. She was darkly and intensely beautiful, temperamental, artistic, impulsive, and introspective. Their first meeting, and the romance that followed, set the tone for their tempestuous marriage of forty-five

<sup>127</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 70.

<sup>128</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 81.

years. Tillich arrived at the ball – a freewheeling costume-party of the kind that was common in Berlin at the time – wearing a turban, glasses, and a shabby, ill-fitting cutaway suit. His divorce was still in the works, and only a few weeks previously his sister Johanna had died in childbirth. His manner was slack and despondent.

Hannah wore a tunic with green silk stockings to the party. Her first reaction to Tillich was an intense, uncontrollable feeling of hatred. Both had arrived with other dates, who quickly abandoned them in order to pair off with one another, leaving Hannah and Paulus to walk stiffly and awkwardly arm-in-arm around the ballroom. He halfheartedly tried to put his hand up her skirt; she rebuffed him. But her initial revulsion towards him softened as he opened up about his personal life; he told her she reminded him of his recently deceased sister Johanna, whose name she shared. She later recounted the lonely figure cut by Tillich at the party:

My heart went out to him. He had been converted into a burdened human being against a turbulent backdrop of gold and red paper garlands, in a crowd of masked people, among the strains of dance music and shouts of joy. ... Now he seemed to me the only human being among the clowns and knights, the nymphs and dwarfs.

As Ash Wednesday grew near, the party and the music swelled, the lights went out, and surrounding couples began to embrace. Tillich, retaining his sense of shyness and bourgeois propriety even among the liberated milieu to which he was drawn, did not want to kiss in public and asked to leave with her. Hannah insisted on going home alone, leaving Tillich – together with the new couple with whom they had each arrived as dates – standing watching her depart down the staircase past the "twisted legs and lazily forgetful arms" of other couples in a moment she later

described as a “divine present.” She returned home with a “strong sense of shock, that I had fallen into a deep well, not of water but of raging fire.”<sup>129</sup>

Their budding romance quickly turned into a torrid affair; Hannah was engaged to another art teacher, Albert Gottschow, a timid and good-natured man with a more conventional, bourgeois outlook than Tillich. Hannah left Berlin to marry and live with Gottschow in Greiz, telling Tillich ambiguously that she would return to him in one year. The pair continued to pursue an affair – by letter and also occasionally in person – over the course of the following year, during which time she became pregnant by Albert. Late in the pregnancy, in response to Tillich’s increasingly urgent pleading, she fled from Greiz to Tillich’s apartment in Berlin – when she arrived, he was romancing a student, an event which did not derail their own affair – and wrote to Albert asking for a divorce. Albert only acceded after the child had been born and had died after being neglected in a nursery. The divorce proceeded, and Tillich and Hannah were married in 1924. Hannah later wrote that neither of their past histories, “nor our divorces and memories of our divorced spouses ever played any role in Paulus’s and my relationship. The past seemed to be over when we entered our life together. No memories.”<sup>130</sup>

### **Tillich’s Erotic Solution – And Its Interpreters**

We draw nearer to addressing the controversial subject of Tillich’s love life, his marriage, and what he referred to as his “erotic solution.” The Tillich marriage

<sup>129</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 83-6.

<sup>130</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 97.

was what we would today call an “open marriage,” but the exact meaning of this openness was ambiguous – and interpreted differently by the different parties. In Paulus and Hannah’s circle at the time they met and courted, sexual monogamy was considered to be bourgeois and repressive. The non-conventional arrangement of their marriage was a mark of their alienation from their families, their revolt against middle-class morality, and their belonging to the world of “La Boheme.” After his experiences in the war and the ordeal of his divorce, Tillich was determined no longer to be bound by conventional restraints when it came to his relations with the opposite sex. Love for him was by definition non-possessive; vows, like the one he had kept on behalf of the Wingolf Society, were potentially idolatrous. “I deny the possibility of a vow,” he later said, “because of the finitude of the finite. A vow, if it is an absolute commitment, would make the moment in which we make it infinite or absolute. Other moments come which reveal the relativity of the moment in which this decision was once made.”<sup>131</sup>

This perspective did not imply an entirely libertine sexual ethic, but it did mean that Tillich sought to navigate each situation and each relationship on its own terms – according to the dictates of what he called “creative justice” or the “transmoral conscience” – rather than accepting monogamy as an absolute law. His relations with women were not a solution but rather a problem demanding creativity, judgment, and daring. Hannah, who belonged to the bohemian and artistic world perhaps more fully than he did, was theoretically in agreement with this open-ended ethic and pursued a number of affairs of her own with both men

<sup>131</sup> Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 195-6.

and women.<sup>132</sup> But these were at least partly responses to her husband's far more adventuresome pursuits; beneath her sometimes ostentatious non-conformity, Hannah confided to her friends that she craved a more conventional arrangement than the one she had and that she felt the sting of jealousy more or less constantly.<sup>133</sup> Her disappointed expectation that Paulus would remain faithful to her provoked her into towering rages to which his response seems to have been a combination of withdrawal and transparent dishonesty, and until the very final years of his life he was entangled in a multiplicity of relationships – of varying degrees of seriousness – with different women.

Tillich's marriage was, as the Paucks write, like his favorite painting, Picasso's "Guernica": "it remained in the same place but was in constant danger of falling apart."<sup>134</sup> Tillich's idea of love – the dynamic of reunion overcoming estrangement – inclined him towards a pattern of extramarital affairs and passionate reunions. Paulus and Hannah's connection was intense and their lives deeply intertwined. Near the beginning of their relationship, they shared an ecstatic experience while climbing a mountaintop in Germany that Tillich referenced frequently in later years.<sup>135</sup> The couple had two children together: Erdemunde, or "Mutie," (b. 1926) and Rene (b. 1935). Hannah took care of Tillich in numerous external ways, following him into exile in America after he was dismissed by the Nazi government, raising his children and tending to his household, accompanying

<sup>132</sup> One of the resentments that Hannah seems to have held most strongly against her husband, one that she repeats several times in her book, is that he refused to participate in a foursome with her. Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 20, 249.

<sup>133</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 87.

<sup>134</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 91.

<sup>135</sup> May, *Paulus*, 57.

him on numerous travels throughout the United States and the world, and celebrating his many successes as a theologian – despite her own emphatic and sometimes embittered atheism. She, for her part, was deeply dependent upon him, emotionally as well as financially. Near the end of the memoir, she reflected on where she had fit into Tillich's life: "I had shared it, hated it, loved it, rebuked it. I had fought for survival, being submerged, serving him, ... cursing him for turning me into an abstraction. Every morning I was willing and glad to live again; every evening I felt shoved beneath a heap of stones."<sup>136</sup>

Grace Leonard wrote that watching the Tillichs speak to each other, she could often sense "the undertow of a titanic struggle."<sup>137</sup> It was an unusual dynamic: at home, Tillich was mild and non-confrontational, a mirror image of the towering theologian he presented to the rest of the world. He silently endured Hannah's regular torrent of suspicion and jealousy, probably in part because he sensed that much of it was justified. But he refused to cease – or effectively to conceal – his affairs, which he seems to have pursued partly to escape from the enclosing intimacy he felt Hannah attempting to impose upon him.<sup>138</sup> The element of romance, moreover, he believed to be essential to creativity in general and to his own creativity especially. Tillich teasingly used to call Hannah – whether in cruelty or wisdom – his "second-best"; not because there was anyone else in his life who was more important to him, but rather because of what he called his "cosmic reservation," that "one must reserve a place for the great unknown One who might

<sup>136</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 242.

<sup>137</sup> Grace Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 15.

<sup>138</sup> Rene Tillich, "My Father, Paul Tillich,"

come, as the Messiah might come at any moment to the waiting Jews."<sup>139</sup> Tillich expressed his view privately to Leonard that "for a marriage to be successful, it should always have a certain degree of tension in it."<sup>140</sup>

Whether the Tillich marriage was "successful" was an open question. Its early years in Germany were lively, chaotic, and filled with numerous conflicts, emotions, and entanglements; Tillich seems to have been particularly enterprising in the sexual realm during this time. The trial of Naziism and emigration to America was taxing but also bonding for the couple. The 1940s were a low point, when Hannah's isolation in New York City, Tillich's growing prominence and remoteness from the family, their shared frustration with the stuffy atmosphere of Union Theological Seminary, and Tillich's affair with one woman in particular, Hilde Frankl, combined to put intense strain on the marriage. During this period Hannah repeatedly pressed Tillich for a divorce, which he resisted from what seems to have been a combination of genuine concern for what would happen to her, a desire to protect the children, and anxiety about his reputation and career. Rene Tillich later commended his father for having "practiced *Realpolitik* in his marriage" by resisting Hannah's demands for a divorce, by getting the house in East Hampton where they could comfortably co-habitate over the summers, and by protecting the children, at least some of the time, from Hannah's often smothering attentions and violent rages.<sup>141</sup> In

<sup>139</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 104.

<sup>140</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 13.

<sup>141</sup> Rene Tillich, "My Father, Paul Tillich," 12-13. Rene is dismissive of the idea, which Hannah promoted in *From Time to Time* and which Alexander Irwin makes central to his argument in *Eros Towards the World*, that Tillich did not grant Hannah a divorce because he feared for his reputation. "I understand from my sister that people say he did not divorce her out of fear for what it would do to his career. The man who opposed Hitler would cave in to a few bigots in this country? I hope not. Anyway, he had already alienated anyone who would care through his theological thinking. I believe he stayed in the marriage because he



their final decade or so, the couple recouped a measure of peace and conjugality, especially in their travels around the world and during their summer stays in East Hampton; by that time they were better off financially and Tillich's libido had slowed down somewhat.

If reticence on this entire topic were possible, it might well be preferable; alas, it has not been possible since 1973, eight years after Tillich's death, when Hannah published her divulging, partly angry, partly compassionate, and extremely interesting memoir of her life together with Tillich, *From Time to Time*. A brief historiographical detour is thus inevitable at this point. Hannah's description of her husband's many erotic adventures, his pornographic and sadomasochistic fantasy life, and their tempestuous marriage provoked a storm of controversy within the theological community at the time of its publication and did considerable damage to Tillich's standing as one of the leading lights of twentieth-century theology and philosophy. The uproar was further heightened by the nearly simultaneous publication of Rollo May's more sympathetic portrait of Tillich, *Paulus*, a book that was criticized at the time as an idealization and a hastily put-together rebuttal to Hannah's book.

It is also impossible to discuss Tillich as a lover and a husband without reckoning with Hannah herself, the woman to whom he was married for over forty years, to whom he dedicated the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*: "For Hannah, the companion of my life."<sup>142</sup> Of his many relationships with the opposite

loved Hannah and because he was a practitioner of the European art of *Realpolitik*, a skill he thought the Americans lacked."

<sup>142</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, volume 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), dedication.

sex, Tillich's marriage was arguably the most dysfunctional and disturbing of all. Hannah was, by the general consent of almost everyone who knew her, a force of nature. She was passionate, intuitive, opinionated, and depending on her mood both tender and vituperative, servile and hostile, generous and narcissistic. One of Tillich's students described her appearance as that of a "Brechtian medusa."<sup>143</sup> She had, to put it mildly, a hypersexualized way of interpreting the world; as her book describes, in sometimes painful detail, she participated enthusiastically in the freewheeling arrangement of their open marriage – even as she felt intense jealousy towards her husband, with whom she was, by her own admission, obsessed. Throughout her time with Tillich, she also harbored literary ambitions that she only realized – and even then not fully successfully – with the publication of her memoir. Rene recounted that Hannah used to declare of Paulus, "He is not the real genius of the family. I, Hannah Tillich, am."<sup>144</sup> Reading her book, it is easy to observe both the genius and the hubris in this statement.

*From Time to Time* is a strange book with a fragmentary, unfinished quality. The key to interpreting it properly is to recognize its experimental, modernist ambitions. It is an expressionist portrait, sometimes exaggerated and often outlandish, yet also somehow true to life. Like her husband, Hannah came of age artistically and intellectually during the bohemian ferment of post-WWI Germany: an explosive and often-decadent combination of expressionism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and occultism ruled the cultural landscape. Hannah had for years

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Paul Lee, August 10, 2016.

<sup>144</sup> Rene Tillich, "My Father, Paul Tillich," in Iilona Nord and Yorick Spiegel eds., *Spurensuche: Lebens- und Denkwege Paul Tillichs* (Münster, Germany: Lit, 2001), 14.

been a writer – mostly of poetry – and includes alongside the main narrative of her book many snatches of her contemporaneous writing: poems, travel diaries, a one-act play, and dreamy, fantasia-like conversations between her and Paulus.

Emotionally speaking, these dialogues seem true to life; whether they actually happened is less clear. The main point was not to give a soberly objective history but rather to capture the texture of feeling throughout the various stages of her life. Towards the end of *From Time to Time*, she describes how much of her connection to Paulus ran through her “mediumistic ability,” her capacity to “sense the flavor of past centuries”; one senses same tendency in her writing about her own life.<sup>145</sup> The perspective of the book, moreover, is ambiguous and seemingly mutable; it is written in the first person, but sometimes with an uncertainty about whether she is speaking out of the present – i.e. after Tillich’s death – or simultaneously with the events she describes. She told an interviewer that she wrote the book in reverse chronological order.<sup>146</sup>

Whatever her intentions, *From Time to Time* caused a minor scandal. In some ways, what happened to Tillich’s reputation in the aftermath of the publication of the book belonged to the more general decline of liberal Protestant theology – and the intellectual scene that supported it – from its brief, fragile period of midcentury prominence. It also reflected a cultural and intellectual moment of general splintering and nastiness. The great man with feet of clay: the fall of Tillich’s

<sup>145</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 242.

<sup>146</sup> For Hannah’s process as she was writing the book, see the interview she gave to Miles O’Brien Riley shortly after its publication, “What On Earth Are You Doing For Heaven’s Sake?” 1974, Hannah Tillich Papers, bMS 721/6 (4), Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

reputation was almost a trope of the era. Among religious conservatives, the disclosures about his personal life were taken as confirmation of longstanding suspicions that he was more pagan than Christian. Among many feminists, at the height of the women's liberation movement, Hannah's book was read as an act of female self-assertion and a blow against the patriarchal religious establishment.<sup>147</sup> Those parts of the counterculture that still cared about institutional religion were inclined to snicker at the thought of an oversexed theologian, a "dirty old man."<sup>148</sup> Liberal mainline Protestants, among whom Tillich's name had once been legion, reacted with a combination of anguish, disavowal, defensiveness, and embarrassment. The press, which had done so much to inflate Tillich's reputation in the first place, reveled amid the scandal and spectacle of it all. A *Time* magazine joint review of *From Time to Time* and *Paulus* captured the tone of smirking innuendo when it described the Tillich marriage as "something like Cabaret played out in a seminary drawing room—or bedroom."<sup>149</sup>

Rollo May was prescient when he predicted that *From Time to Time* would be "taken as pornography." He wrote this in a 1972 letter to Hannah urging her, as did many of the Tillichs' close friends, to reconsider publishing her book. May accused Hannah of "exhibitionism" and of reducing Tillich "to a corpse that pornographers fight over." "It would be humiliating for you to have it accepted for publication," he warned. "The compassionate side which I see in it ... would not be seen by the

<sup>147</sup> For a sampling of these responses, see Ronald Stone, *Politics and Faith: Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich at Union Seminary in New York*. Other feminist reckonings with Tillich's eroticism have been more sympathetic.

<sup>148</sup> See Jeffrey Kirpal, *Esalen*,

<sup>149</sup> "Paul Tillich, Lover," *Time*, 102, no. 15 (October 8, 1973), 79. See also Martin Green, "Paul Tillich," *New York Times*, December 19, 1976.

public.”<sup>150</sup> Hannah took offense at the charge of pornography, and May’s heavy-handed effort to dissuade her likely only steeled her determination to move forward. “I react very badly to pressure,” she wrote to a friend of May’s letter.<sup>151</sup> Regarding *From Time to Time* as “my liberation, my catharsis,” Hannah was apparently inspired by the confessional, warts-and-all style of literary memoir being revived in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Far more than women’s liberation, which Hannah viewed with skepticism and occasional hostility, it was books like Norman Mailer’s *Advertisements for Myself* and Norman Podheretz’s *Making It* that served as her model. In one interview she gave shortly after the book came out, she quoted Mailer: “It is time for us to stop writing about our public idols as if they weren’t human.”<sup>152</sup> Like Podheretz, however, Hannah badly misread the dynamics of literary fame and publicity. In later years she came to regret her haste in publishing the book, which strained her relationship with friends and both of her adult children.<sup>153</sup>

May, too, came to regret his book on Tillich. Contrary to the post-publication rumors, he had been at work on *Paulus* for several years before ever reading Hannah’s manuscript, and when he finally did so considered delaying publication because he did not want the two books to come out at the same time. In his cautionary letter to Hannah, he expressed his reluctance to get into a “happy

<sup>150</sup> Rollo May to Hannah Tillich, n.d., Robert C. Kimball Papers, correspondence with Hannah Tillich, June 1972-March 1974, bMS 368/8 (9), Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

<sup>151</sup> Hannah Tillich to Clayton Carson, September 12, 1972, Robert C. Kimball Papers, correspondence with Hannah Tillich, June 1972-March 1974 bMS 368/8 (9).

<sup>152</sup> John Barkham, “The Author Speaks,” Robert C. Kimball Papers, correspondence with Hannah Tillich, June 1972-March 1974 bMS 368/8 (9).

<sup>153</sup> Marion Pauck, “Review of Ronald Stone’s Book: Politics and Faith,” *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2015), 13.

hunting ground for pornography about Paulus.”<sup>154</sup> At the urging of friends, however, he went forward with publication after all. His chapter on “Eros” presents a complicated but ultimately forgiving picture of his teacher, one that chalks up Tillich’s many romantic entanglements with women to “the simple fact” of his being “a remarkably lovable man.” Tillich had, as May puts it, “Eros enough for all”; he exercised upon women “the daimonic fascination which Goethe says is given for no fathomable reason to certain men and not to others.” Tillich could not help having a magnetic presence to which women responded; when he finished his lectures, he was invariably surrounded by a literal crowd of female admirers. Tillich’s seductiveness, May went on to argue, was of a sensual rather than a sexual nature: “the distinction is crucial.” May concludes his discussion on an exculpatory note: “In our 1960s and 1970s, Paulus’ eroticism would be accepted without much of a stir. In this sense, with all his problems in loving, he was perhaps three decades ahead of his time.”<sup>155</sup>

May seems to have had access to a good deal of Tillich’s private correspondence with his lovers, and he quotes these letters liberally and to striking effect. His quotations from *Paulus* are the only extant traces of these highly intimate documents; presumably he viewed them in the early stages of researching the biography, when Hannah was giving him uninhibited access to Tillich’s papers and before she herself discovered and burned them, an event she describes at the end of *From Time to Time*.<sup>156</sup> One of the most revealing of these letters Tillich wrote,

<sup>154</sup> Rollo May to Hannah Tillich, n.d., Robert Kimball Papers,

<sup>155</sup> May, *Paulus*, 49, 51, 65.

<sup>156</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 240-3.

probably to his mistress Hilde Frankl, after a close friend had been publicly outed and disgraced for some kind of erotic misbehavior. Tillich expressed a horrified sense of identification with the man:

I saw myself as I would be seen by others. Was my way right? I dared much (as you did) internally. Daring includes the possibility, and often the probability, of failure. Was my erotic life a failure or was it a daring way of opening up new human possibilities? I do not know the answer. But I am more inclined to give a self-rejecting than a self-affirming answer.

May provided his own answer to Tillich's question: "I have no hesitation in stating my own conclusion: it was clearly the latter."<sup>157</sup> This confident verdict, while understandable given May's loyalty to Tillich, seems not to honor the honest doubt and guilt that Tillich felt about his own erotic experiments. It certainly does not comport particularly well with what Tillich said to Hannah on his deathbed. "My poor Hannachen. I was very base to you, forgive me."<sup>158</sup>

May does not mention Hannah's memoir in his book, and deals with Hannah herself only very glancingly. But after the appearance of several hostile reviews of his book – including one in *Psychology Today* that called *Paulus* "an attempt at whitewashing" and "a masterpiece of rationalization" – May decided to go public with his criticisms of *From Time to Time*.<sup>159</sup> In an interview with *Christian Century*, he denied that *Paulus* was a response to Hannah's book but nevertheless accused her of presenting Tillich as "a kind of adolescent voyeur" and of implying "there were actual sexual relationships between him and a long series of women. That's

<sup>157</sup> May, *Paulus*, 65.

<sup>158</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 223.

<sup>159</sup> John Wren-Lewis, "The Life and Loves of Paul Tillich," *Psychology Today* (April 1974); Seward Hiltner, "Tillich the Person," 382-388.

not true.” He also characterized Hannah as “an emotional German woman who was made jealous many, many times by Paulus” and who had published her memoir as an act of vengeance against her husband. “I have no arguments against taking revenge, if one wants it,” he said. “Yet I feel it is unfortunate that Hannah waited until after Paulus’s death to take hers.”<sup>160</sup>

Several of the reviews and much of the talk about the two books focused on the spectacle of the loyal, protective protégé squaring off against the angry, vindictive wife.<sup>161</sup> May himself seemed to sense that, by speaking out, he was feeding into the very exhibitionism he decried in Hannah’s book. In the interview with *Christian Century*, he said that he was “sick about the whole thing.” The mood of the reading public, he claimed, was one of “decadence ... and in odd but different ways Hannah’s book and my book fit right into it.” He attributed negative reaction to his book to the “anti hero mood of our society,” to the “great need to scandalize, to gloat over the foibles of important figures,” and to the tendency on everyone’s part to “find reassurance when a man of Paulus’s stature is shown with all the petty adulteries of everybody else.” He continued: “I have the feeling that Sartre’s view of society in *The Flies* fits us today. The people in the play hold a great celebration of guilt. That fits Watergate and in some ways our whole society.”<sup>162</sup>

The controversy over *From Time to Time* and *Paulus* would perhaps not be worth reliving had it not shaped the way we interpret Tillich’s relationships and

<sup>160</sup> Eliot Wright, “Paul Tillich as Hero: An Interview with Rollo May,” *Christian Century*, May 15, 1974, 50-3.

<sup>161</sup> See “Paul Tillich, Lover,” 79.

<sup>162</sup> Eliot Wright, “Paul Tillich as Hero: An Interview with Rollo May,” *Christian Century*, May 15, 1974, 50-3.



personal life – and their relation to his work. For the furor produced by the publication of the two books – including the rift between their respective authors – distorted the real value of the information and interpretations present in them. Read side by side, apart from a concern for Tillich’s reputation as such or a prurient interest in sexual gossip, they are not nearly as divergent as one might expect. There are differences of fact and interpretation that need to be adjudicated, to be sure, but in many ways they are complementary accounts.<sup>163</sup> Hannah herself acknowledged as much at the time. She asked May to write the biography in the first place, encouraged him throughout his work on *Paulus*, and even after their falling-out wrote of being in “a concerted action” with him to “speak about the sources of human creativity”; May’s task in this endeavor was to cover “the principle of [Tillich’s] genius,” while she focused on “his tortured soul, his ecstasy, his amoral anti middle class behavior, which everybody, who knew about him, knew.”<sup>164</sup>

When, eight years after the publication of *From Time to Time* and *Paulus*, Wilhelm and Marion Pauck came out with their authorized biography of Tillich, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Work* (1981), most critics hailed their treatment of the theologian’s love life as the definitive solution to the controversies generated by the two earlier works. Especially within the world of friends, colleagues, and former students, the Paucks’ account seemed to put the publicity genie back in the bottle, to navigate successfully between moralism and permissiveness, and to address

<sup>163</sup> This was noted by the more astute reviews the time. See Harvey Cox,

<sup>164</sup> Hannah added that she favored May as a biographer over Tillich’s friend Erik Erikson because she “did not want to have another young Luther. I wanted “Paulus” in his glory, understood by more than psychology, understood by the principle of the genius.”

Tillich's sexuality without indulging in either the overwrought exhibitionism found in Hannah's book or the rationalizations many detected in May's. Tillich's daughter Erdemunde summed up the feeling of many in the Tillich circle when she thanked Marion Pauck for having "given her father back to her"; the strong implication was that her mother's book had taken him away.<sup>165</sup> The Paucks offer a balanced and judicious discussion of Tillich's sexual and erotic liaisons, as well as his marriage: most of it contained in an earlier chapter about Tillich's life in Berlin after World War I. Wilhelm Pauck was close friends with both halves of the Tillich marriage; although the biography is written in an objective voice, it comes across as the account of a wise, insightful, understanding, and occasionally disapproving friend who could see both sides and who felt ultimately saddened by the situation.

The tone of the Paucks' book is one of evenhandedness and circumspection. They characterize the Tillich marriage as unhappy from the beginning, writing: "It was with the understanding on his part that she was prepared to forgive him for his weakness and accept him as he accepted her that he married this inexperienced young woman, who did not entirely comprehend what Tillich expected of her, or envision the implications of it for their life together." Of the effect of Tillich's extramarital relations, they observe:

Love was more interesting, marriage more bearable for him on these terms; it also became more complicated. For Hannah, marriage became a battleground on which she felt constantly driven to fight for her husband's exclusive attention. A pattern developed of stormy scenes, passionate reunions, life together when they traveled, life partly apart at home. Moreover, her inability to hide her jealousy of even the most innocent meetings between Tillich and his friends, men or women—her fear that he

<sup>165</sup> Marion Pauck, "Memories of Erdmuthe Tillich Frarris," *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society* 42 no. 2 (Spring 2016), 4.

might be taken away from her—matched his inability to keep his fatal attraction for and by other women a secret. His obsession was as transparent as her distrust; they suffered together.<sup>166</sup>

It is this kind of mature synthesis of perspectives that earned and continues to earn the book its many plaudits.

And yet: the balance, tact, and consummate good sense of the Paucks' biography can sometimes give their book an overly digested feeling. As a total treatment of Tillich's inner life, the Pauck biography is fairer, more objective, and far more sane than *From Time to Time*. But are objectivity and sanity truly the best criteria when dealing with a subject like Eros? A touch of madness can sometimes be a useful way of reinserting ourselves not merely into what the past was but also into what it was *like*. For there was something about Tillich, especially when it came to his relationships to women, that *was* mad, irrational, split. At its best, *From Time to Time* has a spikiness, a rawness, and a vividness that exceeds anything contained in the Pauck's account for glimpses into what it felt like to be around Tillich and what it was to be married to him. It was not for nothing that Tillich spoke of Hannah "the only woman I could have married"; the occasionally overwrought quality in her memoir was equal to Tillich's own overwrought tendencies, differently expressed. Despite the ordeal of their marriage, there was a way in which they were a fit pair for another. Their marriage was truly like some Greek myth, and *From Time to Time* captures this quality very well; it should not be consigned to the footnotes of Tillich studies. Nor, for that matter, should May's *Paulus*, which in spite of its occasional

<sup>166</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 88.

pompousness and defensiveness, contains many psychologically astute insights worth considering too.

One of the upshots of *From Time to Time's* expressionistic, kaleidoscopic style is that the jealousy and angst that the book conveys is somewhat deceptive: perhaps true to Hannah's feelings at the time her husband's affairs were going on, but not representative of how she felt about them ultimately, or even at the time she published the memoir. May was correct to note the "compassionate side" of the book. In all likelihood, she had mixed feelings herself at the time she was writing; she was a highly temperamental person. She acknowledges as much in self-reflective, regretful asides throughout the book. "Unfortunately, my jealousy made things more unbearable than was necessary," she writes. "Only at a very late age did I find the humor to understand and to 'let it be.'" Or, speaking of her first major eruption of jealousy, provoked by Paulus leaving her alone on their wedding night to attend a party with his male friends: "I was ten years younger and lacked the maturity and generosity to accept him lovingly.... In spite of my sexual experiences, I was an uneducated, childish being. I felt ambivalent about our marital pleasure from then on. Jealousy had sprung from the catastrophe of our wedding night—jealousy manifesting itself as rage. I was very good at outbursts of anger at the memory of myself left out in the cold. Paulus could never live it down."<sup>167</sup>

Hannah also describes how later, during the early 1950s, she learned partially to detach herself from these intense feelings through yoga and meditation, which she learned from an Indian Hatha yogi in New York City, long before either

<sup>167</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 105.

practice became widely fashionable in the 1960s. Of meditation, she writes, "I remember watching my emotional rages walk by in ceremonial procession." During the Tillichs' years at Harvard, a meaningful love affair with a much younger man (to whom Paulus had introduced her) helped her to see her husband's affairs with greater perspective, forgiveness, and even humor:

a change took place in me. I laughed at the tinkling chain of his houris, baring their navals and their breasts, their fannies and their feet, dancing for him as I had danced for him, too. He could not leave them even as he could not give me up, he could not discard a single one of them. When he went back to Germany after many years of absence, there they were, surrounding him with aging sagging breasts, with flattened navals, flat feet, thin hair, and wasted faces, imposing on him, serving him, never letting him go.<sup>168</sup>

This perspective on Tillich's sexuality – more comical than demonic – was much closer to the one espoused by his longtime mistress Hilde Frankl, who found Paulus's pornographic fantasy life to be "very boring." "All men, whether husbands or of the sort mine is," Frankl wrote to Hannah Arendt, referring to Tillich, "are baggage. One should never get annoyed—and yet one does." Arendt's response reflected her own ambivalent friendship with the theologian: "Yes, men are a pretty heavy baggage, but still one does not get on well without them."<sup>169</sup>

All of this said – even after granting Hannah her artistic license and acknowledging the complexity of her portrait of her husband in *From Time to Time* – the book does exaggerate and mislead, more through its hyper-sexualized perspective than by any outright untruth contained in it. Rollo May's complaint that the book often paints Tillich as "a prurient person trying to get as many women as

<sup>168</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 191, 240-1.

<sup>169</sup> Quoted in Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 243.

possible into bed” is justified. As is the assessment made by Rene Tillich, who went on to become a couples therapist in Hawaii, of his own mother:

an underlying distrust which impaired her capacity to love, a pathological jealousy, a tendency to sexualize her experience, and distort reality, particularly in the sexual realm – seeing sex where it wasn’t – and a tendency to ‘split,’ a technical word from psychoanalytic language meaning to overvalue and undervalue, which is what she did regularly with my father.<sup>170</sup>

Hannah’s experience of her husband’s affairs as malign and even annihilating threats to her personal existence does not accurately capture to Tillich’s often accidental method of becoming involved with women; there was a Mr. Magoo-like quality to the way he went through the world that applied to his erotic life as well. Langdon Gilkey’s assessment is again relevant: “something childlike about him, a hint of vulnerability, of near helplessness.” Tillich, as the Paucks write, was “no Don Juan.”<sup>171</sup> He had an irrepressible love for, and curiosity about, the world that drew him into all manner of entanglements and confusions, sometimes quite destructive ones.

Another, related facet of Tillich’s eroticism that is only intermittently visible from Hannah’s account – and that emerges much more clearly from May’s *Paulus* – is the highly personalistic and individualized quality of his relationships. Hannah writes, questionably, of her husband’s “undiscriminating sensuality.” But was it Tillich’s sensuality that was indiscriminating, or rather Hannah’s jealousy? Hannah herself writes that in Berlin, during the early stages of her relationship with Tillich, she was “a young woman fighting for my love life, experiencing the crowd of

<sup>170</sup> Rene Tillich, “My Father, Paul Tillich,” 14.

<sup>171</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 82.

amorous women as one giant, quivering Medusa, the composite vagina of their desire turning into a huge jellyfish that seemed to devour me.”<sup>172</sup> Some historians who have written about this aspect of Tillich have taken a similarly undifferentiated view of his affairs. Eugene McCarraher, an otherwise perceptive commentator on Tillich, writes that his “amorous resume, stocked with seduced and abandoned lovers, betrayed a need to dominate and humiliate women” and says that Tillich “pursued relationships largely through the lens of his own search for transcendent experience.”<sup>173</sup>

Perhaps it could seem so from the outside. For the actual women involved, however, Tillich’s presence usually registered as a special and unique episode in their lives. In his late sixties, he told his son that he had loved twelve women in his life. He was gentle and vulnerable, often to the point of neediness. The letters to his lovers quoted in May’s book are especially revealing on this point: “I draw into me your warmth, your being! I have continuous changes of jubilant and depressive moods. In both of them I would like to have you as near as possible to me!” Or: “All my vitality resurrects if I think of you. Think of me on Easter morning! Will the stone ever be rolled away? Infinite love, P.” Or, brooding on his own death: “Sometimes when I feel this very deeply I say to myself, ‘But she (meaning you) loves me’ and it is as if you stand as the accepting priest, representing the divine voice ... not by saying anything but by being what you are and loving me.”<sup>174</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 104.

<sup>173</sup> McCarraher, *Christian Critics*, 128.

<sup>174</sup> May, *Paulus*, 53.

Although not all of Tillich's relationships continued to the extent that the women might have liked, he succeeded in remaining friends with most of them. May reports that when Tillich was dying in the hospital,

women of whom I had never heard telephoned me from various parts of the country to inquire about him, and I always marveled at their lack of jealousy. It was not that they did not know there were others. But each spoke out of her own conviction that she represented something special to Paulus—some unique insight, revelation, or secret kind of relationship which occurred in some particular hour or walk together. The strange thing is that each was probably right.<sup>175</sup>

Hannah was the obvious exception to this rule of non-jealousy, but even she grudgingly acknowledged that there was something admirable about his warmth and openness with others:

He once said jokingly that he was the most faithful of all men, meaning that he always returned to his initial encounter of spiritual recognition, with a woman or a man. He visualized one's deeper self—perhaps unknown even to that person—clearing away the rubble of superficiality, often as if he had touched one with a magic wand. Friends would never forget the glory he had brought them in understanding each one's deepest being. After that initial encounter, he might easily slide down the ladder to pornography, using the women for his peculiarities.<sup>176</sup>

### **Sadism and the Demonic**

The combination of deep loyalty and pornographic "peculiarities" was present in Tillich's relationship with one of the few such women whose identity is widely known and whose importance in his life is undoubted: Hilde Fränkl, his longtime personal secretary first at the German émigré resettlement agency "Self-Help for Refugees" and later at Union Theological Seminary. Moving in the same

<sup>175</sup> May, *Paulus*, 51.

<sup>176</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 103.



circles as Paulus and Hannah, Fränkl was a much-loved figure among the German émigré community, known for her vivacious storytelling and her natural, unaffected demeanor. She lived nearby to the Tillichs on the Upper West Side, and he often spent evenings with her in her apartment before returning home, a fact that Hannah notes bitterly in her memoir. Frankl died of cancer in 1951; both of the Tillichs visited her throughout her illness. Hannah relates, in one of her book's more chilling passages, an occasion when she sat at Fränkl's feet and fantasized about killing this already-dying woman, "fully aware of the fact that she had estranged you from me." She adds: "I was frightened at my own dream-pleasure, feeling her dying under my hands."<sup>177</sup>

Fränkl was best friends with the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who sometimes facilitated Tillich's liaisons with her and whom Tillich playfully referred to as "H.H.," "Hilde's Hannah," to distinguish her from "his" Hannah, namely Hannah Tillich. Arendt was sometimes dismissively amused by the affair between Tillich and her friend: "Sodom and Gomorrha is in full swing," she observed during one of their assignments at a summer cottage on Cape Cod. Yet Tillich's devotion to Fränkl won Tillich Arendt's lasting admiration, as she recounted in a letter to a friend written upon Tillich's death:

His behavior—he was married, with all the consequent complications—toward my friend was excellent, so to speak, morally. When she was on her deathbed, he did not abandon her—as most of the 'Creative Individuals' she knew did; we were very close at the time, and I saw him there daily. He made a great impression on me, because I understood that, despite all the possible psychological perversities, which are very foreign to me, he was a Christian, that is, capable of Christian love.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 18.

<sup>178</sup> Young-Breuhl, *Hannah Arendt*, 242-3.

This comment from a Jewish, atheist philosopher about Tillich's "Christian love" underscores the complicated relation between his theology and his conduct in love, marriage, and sex. Tillich was of the view – the Paucks go so far as to call it a "rule" – that what redeemed even the most questionable relationship was the presence of agape, the love that acknowledges the other being in his or her center.<sup>179</sup>

This was the "spiritual magic wand" of which Hannah spoke, which he imagined as clearing away the superficialities of his relations with both men and women. As Tillich wrote in *Love, Power, and Justice*:

Sexual desire is not evil as desire, and the breaking of the conventional law is not evil as the breaking of conventional laws, but sexual desire and sexual autonomy are evil if they bypass the centre of the other person—in other words, if they are not united with the two other qualities of love, and if they are not under the ultimate criterion of the agape quality of love. Agape seeks the other one in his centre. Agape sees him as God sees him. Agape elevates libido into the divine unity of love, power, and justice.<sup>180</sup>

In Arendt's opinion, at least, Tillich's affair with Hilde Frankl met this "agape test," in spite of the more perverse and torrid aspects of the relationship. "As far as my friend was concerned," she reflected, "she herself was not originally or ever really perverse; she was only—and it is so rare!—gifted with erotic genius and she understood, so to speak, everything. Though he was often very boring, she maintained her Scheherazade-capacity, because she really loved the man; and he had really loved her."<sup>181</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 90-1.

<sup>180</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 117.

<sup>181</sup> Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 243.

Did Tillich's erotic relationships always live up to the exalted criterion of agape? It is of course impossible to judge any intimate human interaction confidently from the outside. But there is good evidence – as well as basic human wisdom – to suggest that he failed often, and that the statement he made in one of his sermons about human beings in general applied to himself with special force: “Are we not almost always ready to abuse everybody and everything, although often in a very refined way, for the pleasure of self-elevation, for an occasion for boasting, for a moment of lust?”<sup>182</sup> His guilt around this subject was great, pitching him frequently into what he called “manifold fears, expectations, ecstasies, and despairs.”<sup>183</sup> Richard Fox's biography of Reinhold Niebuhr relates an upsetting – if somewhat uncertain – anecdote that, if true, casts Tillich's sexual behavior into a more disturbing light than that of mere dalliances and womanizing. On one occasion, after Niebuhr had advised one of his graduate students to consult with Tillich about some question, Tillich allegedly welcomed the young woman into his office, shut the door, and immediately began fondling her. She reported what happened back to Niebuhr, who was furious; the famous friendship between the two men never recovered.<sup>184</sup>

We are now in the territory of #MeToo and its attendant controversies, especially since the incident seems not to have been an entirely isolated one. His office, it will be remembered, was the place where Tillich welcomed colleagues, friends, and students to discuss personal and intellectual problems; his Harvard

<sup>182</sup> Tillich, “You Are Accepted,” in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 157.

<sup>183</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 82.

<sup>184</sup> Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, 257.

office at the Semitic Museum, he marveled to his friends, was “big enough for dancing” – or for whatever else he got up to in there.<sup>185</sup> Tillich was obviously interested in the sexual dimensions of power, and his own power – interpersonal and, as he got older, institutional – was considerable. But even this side of his sexual makeup was ambiguous. Another, similar anecdote, reported in Raymond Lawrence’s book *Sexual Liberation: The Scandal of Christendom*, had a very different ending from what happened with Reinhold Niebuhr’s student. The woman in this case, a personal friend of Lawrence’s, had been assigned the task of interviewing Tillich for an article. She recalled that “Tillich clicked the lock on his office door after she entered, which sparked her curiosity. He then, without hesitation, proceeded to make her a sexual overture. She declined his offer; her response was accepted graciously. Without further ado, they got on with their interview, which went quite well.” Lawrence further comments: “One instance hardly proves a pattern, but the vignette sounds very much like Tillich, erotically charged and bold, but gracious and humane in his relationships.”<sup>186</sup>

Related to Tillich’s fascination with sexual power were the “psychological perversities” and “pornographic peculiarities” of which the two Hannahs, Arendt and Tillich, spoke. His penchant for sadistic pornography was one of the revelations of *From Time to Time* most shocking to the theological community. In spite of her own embrace of sexual extremes, it was shocking to Hannah initially as well. When she first discovered a pornographic correspondence between Paulus and one of his

<sup>185</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 249.

<sup>186</sup> Raymond J. Lawrence, Jr., *Sexual Liberation: The Scandal of Christendom* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 113.

female friends, she cried from being “so troubled about the deformation of the human image, as I saw it.” In one of the fantasy-conversational sequences in her memoir – of uncertain factual status, it should be noted – she describes a scene in which she interrupts her husband as he watched a pornographic film filled with traditional Christian imagery, reemployed for sadistic effect:

“Ah,” said the old woman [Hannah], entering his room without knocking, “the old torture game.” The old man [Paulus] had pushed the buttons on his custom-made screen. There was the familiar cross shooting up the wall. “So fitting for a Christian and a theologian,” she sneered. A naked girl hung on it, hands tied in front of her private parts. Another naked figure lashed the crucified one with a whip that reached further to another cross, on which a girl was exposed from behind. More and more crosses appeared, all with women tied and exposed from various positions. Some were exposed from the front, some from the side, some from behind, some crouched in fetal position, some head down, or legs apart, or legs crossed—and always whips, crosses, whips.

After discovering her husband’s habit, Hannah attempted to give him pornography, which he resisted and found embarrassing, “since the main appeal,” as Hannah wrote, “was its being kept secret from me.”<sup>187</sup>

Tillich’s sexual sadism was also related to his more general embrace of fantasy, play, imagination, and storytelling. A good many of the “affairs” that Hannah found threatening were in fact erotic correspondences – pornographic fantasies, played out by letter, “in serial” – with women who would “play the game with him,” as Rollo May put it; these epistolary relationships generally grew out of playful or titillating conversations he had had rather than out of physical intimacies. But he did “play the game” in his actual, corporeal life as well. It was his mistress Hilde Frankl’s “Scheherazade-capacity” that caught his interest about her. He, himself, sometimes

<sup>187</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 14; 189-90.

seduced women with his capacity to weave intricate narrative webs in which beauty, enchantment, adventure, fascination, and cruelty were all, in the style of the best Germanic fairy tales, intermixed. Some women responded to his invitation with eagerness and excitement; others were shocked and horrified by this sort of talk.<sup>188</sup>

Rollo May describes an encounter that belongs to the former category, between Tillich and May's fiancée. After a lecture Tillich had given on a college campus, the pair took a long walk on a sunny afternoon, during which Tillich began spinning out an elaborate fantasy involving "elves, trolls, and all sorts of imagined wood sprites, somewhat on the order of Tolkien," which apparently captured the young woman's imagination. At length, Tillich asked her, "And what would we do then?" She responded, "We would lie together." (For his part, May was unthreatened by this conversation, or so he claimed. He even wrote that he had felt "a little proud of the event.")<sup>189</sup> Among those who were shocked and horrified was the novelist Mary McCarthy, whom Tillich once attempted to seduce during a transatlantic steamship voyage using a somewhat darker version of this same kind of fantasy. As she told her friend Hannah Arendt (who by now was used to getting an earful of Tillich's fantasy life), Tillich had consistently turned the conversation towards "sadism, beatings, and biting and Greek gods with little scourges made of willow twigs." McCarthy added, with indignation: "I'm not so naïve as to be surprised at a religious man's having ... 'pagan moments,' but he takes it too much

<sup>188</sup> May, *Paulus*, 64.

<sup>189</sup> May, *Paulus*, 50.

for granted in himself somehow, as though it were an effusion of godhead in him.”<sup>190</sup>

What was the source of this sadistic side of Tillich’s imagination? It is certainly possible to find a number of smoking guns in Tillich’s childhood, and the prevalence of psychoanalysts in his milieu ensured that many did. May, who was privy to his erotic letters, places a great emphasis upon the death of Tillich’s mother when he was seventeen and upon his need for revenge against her for having left him:

If the mother dies, the child is bound to ask the question, ‘Did she not love me?’ (If she had, she would not have left me.) It is not too far to jump to the feeling ‘If I had killed her, it would be better, because then I would know she did not leave me of her own free will.’ Thus the child develops a strain of killing behavior, i.e., sadism.”

In good neo-Freudian fashion, however, May speculates that the sexual mores of Wilhelmine German society contributed something as well. Presumably reflecting some insight into Tillich’s childhood gleaned from one of these “serials,” May writes that it was the custom in Tillich’s school days

to punish a person by adding humiliation to pain. The teacher would take down a boy’s pants and expose his buttocks to the class as he paddled him. The maids would ask Paulus when he got home from school, “Were you beaten today?” with prurient expressions on their faces, and then ask lasciviously, “Did you enjoy it?”<sup>191</sup>

These rather striking childhood memories and/or experiences no doubt played a role in Tillich’s later sexual makeup, although their exact status is uncertain. Freud speculated that memories of childhood sexual experience, including his own

<sup>190</sup> Frances Kierman, *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy* (New York: Norton, 2000), 425; *Between Friends*, .

<sup>191</sup> May, *Paulus*, 62.

memory of being seduced by a family governess, were commonly in fact fantasies and projections by the child: this remains a still-controversial theory.

It is clear, in any case, that Tillich's childhood was pervaded by an atmosphere of thinly veiled sexual cruelty that he carried with him into adulthood.

In *From Time to Time*, Hannah relates another dream-conversation between husband and wife:

"Tell me about your sisters."

"I threw them into the bushes," the old man said. "I handcuffed them."

"And how about your friends among the boys at school?"

"I always tried to sit in the last bench, behind the other boys. I imagined I had a machine gun and mowed them down. I shot them down in rows, bang, bang, bang, bang."

"So," she said, "it was 'bang, bang, you're dead;' that must have been fun for you."

"Fun galore."<sup>192</sup>

This interesting exchange reveals another facet of Tillich's sadism, which was that men were frequently, if indirectly, its object too. Tillich had a tendency to gravitate towards the wives (or the fiancées, as we have seen) of his friends. He in fact relished being seen as a threat to the men who were close to him, men for whom he often had great respect and deference. He avoided direct confrontation, but enjoyed being regarded as dangerous. This dynamic played itself out not only sexually but also in his professional life. At Harvard, he took great enjoyment in being seen as a menace, drawing large crowds of undergraduates to his lectures, by the logical positivists of the Philosophy Department; throughout his career he enjoyed his reputation as a scourge to theological orthodoxy even as he cultivated friendships

<sup>192</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 19.



with orthodox theologians.<sup>193</sup> To Thomas Altizer, he admitted “the real Tillich is the radical Tillich.” All of this, of course, can be interpreted oedipally – as a replaying of his early, guilty, ambivalent rivalry with his authoritarian father for his mother’s affection and, later on, for intellectual supremacy.

Yet there are limits – in interest as well as in usefulness – to the oedipal interpretation of Tillich’s behavior. Some of the more fertile implications of Tillich’s sadism are in fact intellectual and religious, and point towards the important question of how his life and his thought were connected to each other. May reports of Tillich’s erotic letters that “his fantasies were often about judges and criminals. Through torture the guilty person would be made to confess.”<sup>194</sup> That Tillich’s fantasy world was an unforgiving realm of punishment, discipline, and cruelty presents a fascinating counterpoint to his theology of acceptance – and indeed to the personal acceptance that he was able to offer to numerous friends in his non-fantasy life. Which is not to say that he was a hypocrite but rather that It is the mirror image of the unbidden love – “creative justice” – which he saw as bursting through and conquering all guilt, law, and condemnation. But it is more than this, for it is also an expression of the deep ambiguity – the rule of demonic powers – that Tillich perceived in all realms of existence and which he saw as the necessary precondition for the miracle of grace.

Once, standing before the gargoyles and statues in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, he exclaimed, “The saints are sitting on their demons.”<sup>195</sup> This

<sup>193</sup>

<sup>194</sup> May, *Paulus*, 64.

<sup>195</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 79.

was true especially of himself, as he well knew. His sadism seems to have been a method – partly playful, partly in earnest – of expressing his guilt: guilt about his family, guilt about his conduct toward Hannah, guilt, even, about his own sadistic sexual tendencies. “In punishing the criminal in those ‘serials,’” May writes, “he surely was punishing himself.”<sup>196</sup>

Yet it also made him powerfully conscious of the release from this judging and punishing mindset. The deeply autobiographical conclusion to Tillich’s most famous sermon – “You Are Accepted” – seems worth quoting here:

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: “You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!” If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.<sup>197</sup>

On the top of the manuscript of this sermon, which he composed on his sixtieth birthday, he wrote “For myself!”

<sup>196</sup> May, *Paulus*, 64.

<sup>197</sup> Tillich, “You Are Accepted,” in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 157.

### King Midas of the Spirit

The emotional catharsis at the end of Hannah's autobiography is her discovery, after Paulus's death, of his trove of erotic memorabilia: letters, photographs, poems, and other evidences of the life she knew all along that her husband had been living but had never before seen laid out so explicitly. Next to the desk where she found this material, meanwhile, were the stacks of Tillich's books and unpublished manuscripts. Hannah wrote bitterly that she was "tempted to place between the sacred pages of his highly esteemed lifework those obscene signs of the real life that he had transformed into the gold of abstraction—King Midas of the spirit." Knowing him as intimately as she did, Hannah was able to correlate Tillich's many moods, passions, desires, idiosyncrasies, life-moments, and relationships with the words and concepts he wove together so eloquently in his work. "It was all in his books," she wrote, "human beings pressed like butterflies, whole landscapes of oceans, trees, blades of grass, and mountains, pressed between the pages of these often-discussed volumes." Unhappily for Tillich's latter-day biographers (though perhaps for the best overall), Hannah never undertook this project of mapping out the connections between his intimate life and specific passages from his work. Instead, she spent two days burning the correspondence, "as he had wished me to do."<sup>198</sup>

Yet her impassioned comment about Tillich being "King Midas of the spirit" raises important questions about the relationship between his life, his work, and his thought. Did he, as she accused him elsewhere in the book, "[transmute] his

<sup>198</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 240-3.

personal experience by shaping it into golden words meant for a world audience"?<sup>199</sup> Hannah seems to have meant this comment in a mostly caustic way, but her formulation also suggests a basic congruence between his person and his intellectual output that might be interpreted in a more charitable or even heroic light. It is obvious that Tillich did transform his life – its passions, its struggles, and indeed its occasional ugliness – into the deepest kinds of human insight. His guilt and his ecstasy was in plain view in many of his sermons: "Are we not almost always ready to abuse everybody and everything, although often in a very refined way, for the pleasure of self-elevation, for an occasion for boasting, for a moment of lust?"; "I speak of the ecstasy of living that includes participation in the highest and the lowest of life in one and the same experience"; or, "We feel ashamed when our intimate self, mental or bodily, is opened. We try to cover our nakedness, as did Adam and Eve when they became conscious of themselves."<sup>200</sup> Tillich's personal life embodied the very ambiguity which he believed lay at the heart of all human existence and that he attempted to describe in his work. His theology helps us to understanding his sexual behavior; the one is an exposition of the other. For conservative theological critics, any theology formulated by an individual so enmeshed in moral and sexual ambiguity must be tainted. But such a critique is only possible only if the critic elevates himself above such ambiguity, something Tillich steadfastly refused to do. He was able to write authoritatively about the dynamics of estrangement and the ambiguity of life exactly because he knew whereof he spoke.

<sup>199</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 24.

<sup>200</sup> Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 157; Tillich, "God's Pursuit of Man," in *The Eternal Now*, 106; Tillich, "Loneliness and Solitude," in *The Eternal Now*, 3.

The ability to see beyond moralizing reactions, moreover, allows for the consideration of other important questions about Tillich's life-work-thought nexus. Was Tillich's personal life, as Eugene McCarraher has it, "a thicket of powerlust, sexual desire, and spiritual longing that he struggled to redeem in his work"?<sup>201</sup> Was it true what Tillich once told Grace Cali, in a dejected and self-doubting mood, that "everything that is in my sermons is what I am not"? (The phrase echoes the famous saying – one of Tillich's favorites – by that other famous theologian named Paul: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.")<sup>202</sup> Is it true, as Marion Pauck has surmised, that Tillich's relations with women were what allowed him to face the extreme dryness of his work, especially the Systematic Theology? ("First pleasure, then work," she writes of his approach.)<sup>203</sup> Where can we find Tillich's person in his work? As Tillich's student Frederick Parrella asks in a thoughtful reflection on this topic, "Is the source of the [theme of] universal ambiguity in his writings to be found in his own lived experience, with its own moral struggles? Or were his moral struggles a product of his intellectual work? Did Tillich's system produce Tillich, or Tillich his system?"<sup>204</sup> These questions are of course ultimately unanswerable. They themselves belong to the very ambiguity of life that was one of Tillich's great themes. The doubt that he often expressed to his friends about his behavior – sexual, marital, and otherwise – was realistic doubt. And the possibility that his deepest insights into human and divine realities were

<sup>201</sup> McCarraher, *Christian Critics*, .

<sup>202</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 119; Tillich, "The Good That I Will, I Do Not," in *The Eternal Now*, 37.

<sup>203</sup> Marion Pauck, email to author, July 11, 2017.

<sup>204</sup> Frederick J. Parrella, "Does Life Imitate Art or Art Life? The Ambiguities in Paul Tillich's Theology and in His Personal Life," in Marc Dumas, Jean Richard, and Bryan Wagoner, eds., *Les ambiguïtés de la vie selon Paul Tillich* (Berlin: De Greyter, 2017), 26.

purchased the price of emotional suffering by himself and by those closest to him, especially his wife, necessarily tempers our appreciation for such insights – with melancholy, with indignation, perhaps with guilt.<sup>205</sup>

The sacrifices Tillich incurred and demanded of those around him for the sake of his work were great. According to the Paucks, Tillich's ultimate concern was his work, what he used to call, with a steely Germanic flourish, "mein Werk."<sup>206</sup> The after-dinner hours – from ten or eleven until one in the morning – were sacrosanct for Tillich, times when he would retire to his office to read, write, and think. In another one of the sub-rosa confessions contained among his sermons, Tillich alluded to the possibility that work was indeed an idol for him, as it was for many of his contemporaries. "We are concerned about our work; it is the basis of our existence," he wrote in "Ultimate Concern." "We may love it or hate it; we may fulfill it as a duty or as a hard necessity. But anxiety grasps us whenever we feel the limits of our strength, our lack of efficiency, the struggle with our laziness, the danger of failure."<sup>207</sup> These kinds of anxieties beset Tillich constantly, particularly towards the end of his life as his public fame grew and as it became evident that the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* would not be as good as the first two volumes. A letter about his troubles with volume 3, quoted by Rollo May and apparently addressed to one of his lovers, suggests the nature of his angst, as well as its tangled relationship with his erotic constitution: "I am worried more than ever. The system crumbles. What shall I do? Shall I collect fragments? Declare that the attempt failed? Try it

<sup>205</sup> For a fleshed-out version of this point, see Irwin, *Eros Towards the World*, 99-119.

<sup>206</sup> Marion Pauck, email to Charles Riggs, July 11, 2017.

<sup>207</sup> Tillich, "Ultimate Concern" in *The New Being*, 154.

again—which I probably will do. . . . It is all as I experienced it when I was 12 years old: the whip of anxiety about unfinished work! I kiss thee in despairing passion.” Tillich often told his friends that he always composed his sermons while thinking of a particular friend, usually a woman.<sup>208</sup>

Yet whenever we are tempted to “speak about the sources of human creativity,” as Hannah understood her and Rollo May’s task in writing about her husband, it is important to remember the limits of our knowledge about other human beings, whether dead or living. As Tillich liked to say, the center of another personality is always impenetrable and unknowable. This is true in the narrow, historical sense that our historical and biographical information is always incomplete, and emphatically so in Tillich’s case. All of his most intimate correspondence was burned by his wife after his death. The details of his relationships (beyond his marriage), the dynamics of his evidently prolific fantasy life, the nature of his personal commitments and attachments: for the most part these are lost, probably for the best. Much about Tillich is, and will almost certainly remain, shrouded in obscurity. Although he led one of the most notorious personal lives of almost any major American intellectual of the twentieth century – certainly of any theologian – there was an important sense in which he succeeded in maintaining his much-prized secrecy. Although he no doubt would have been mortified by the spectacle of *From Time to Time*’s publication, the book was far more a blow against Tillich’s public image – “Paul Tillich, the object,” as he liked to say – than against the man himself.

<sup>208</sup> May, *Paulus*, 71.

But Tillich's unknowability is also the symptom of the larger unknowability of human beings, a theme to which his writings amply attest. In one of his last and most deeply personal sermons, "Solitude and Loneliness," Tillich reflected upon the wisdom of language in distinguishing two words to describe the dual nature of being alone: "loneliness," to express the pain of aloneness, and "solitude" to describe the glory of aloneness. Tillich knew both loneliness and solitude in his life, and his affairs were sometimes desperate, often destructive attempts to escape the inevitable loneliness he experienced amid grief, suffering, and exile. But he also knew solitude, which could be found "in the reading of poetry, in listening to music, in looking at pictures, and in sincere thoughtfulness." And above all in his work. In the midst of such experiences, he wrote, "something is done to us. The center of our being, the innermost self that is the ground of our aloneness, is elevated to the divine center and taken into it. Therein we can rest without losing ourselves."<sup>209</sup> In a letter to his childhood friend Maria Rhine, Tillich maintained that "There must be a realm of absolute privacy in every developed personality. You know that I have such parts in myself and I hope you also have them. So please don't judge the impenetrable depths of a human soul."<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Paul Tillich, "Solitude and Loneliness," in *The Eternal Now*, 17-18, 22, 24.

<sup>210</sup> Paul Tillich to Maria Rhine, December 12, 1956, April 17, 1957, PTP, bMS 649/178.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **AN AGGIORNAMENTO FOR PROTESTANTS: THE EARLY 1960S AND TILlich'S LATER "FAME"**

In 1958, the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine ran a short, vivid article by Tillich that generated an overwhelming and surprising response from its readers. The postwar era was a time of widespread religious revival in the United States – symbolized most vividly by Billy Graham's evangelistic "crusades," by Norman Vincent Peale's positive thinking, and by the wave of church-construction in the suburbs. But the response to this publication represented something different. Tillich's "The Lost Dimension in Religion" was part of the *Saturday Evening Post's* "Adventures of the Mind" series, an experiment by editors John Kobler and Richard Thruelsen to enlist intellectuals and scientists to stimulate discussion and introduce challenging ideas among the magazine's vast popular readership. The piece by Tillich – by the late 1950s a public commentator on subjects ranging from theology to existentialism to psychoanalysis to modern art – certainly accomplished that goal. Very soon after the article's publication, the offices of the *Post* and of Tillich's secretary were swamped in reader mail, most of it enthusiastic. "The Lost Dimension in Religion" was both a critique of the popular religious revival then underway and a plea for a more authentic and penetrating religious ideal to be cultivated both within and outside the churches.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Lost Dimension in Religion," in *Adventures of the Mind*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Knopf, 1959), 47-56. All quotations in the following pages are taken from this edition. For the fullest account of the response to Tillich's *Saturday Evening Post* piece, see Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 156-60.

The dimension missing from contemporary religion – without which all the outward signs of a resurgence of belief since the end of World War II were, according to Tillich, “nothing but a desperate and mostly futile attempt to regain what has been lost” – was the dimension of depth. “Depth” was a concept drawn from the spatial realm and applied to the spiritual life. To lose the dimension of depth was to lose the ability to ask the most important questions: “What is the meaning of life? Where do we come from, where do we go to? What shall we do, what should we become in the short stretch between birth and death?” Near the beginning of his piece, Tillich offered a provocative and unorthodox definition of religion: “Being religious means asking passionately the question of the meaning of our existence and being willing to receive answers even if the answers hurt.” The presence of large numbers of people in the contemporary world who were deeply concerned with the meaning of their own lives and with the meaning of life generally, and yet who sensed a failure in their own religious traditions to express this concern adequately, made it necessary to distinguish “the meaning of religion as living in the dimension of depth from particular expressions of one’s ultimate concern in the symbols and institutions of a concrete religion.” For “religion in its innermost nature” was more than religion in the “narrower sense” of belief in “the existence of gods or one God” or of “a set of activities for relating oneself to these beings in thought, devotion, and obedience.”

Tillich traced the loss of the dimension of depth in concrete religions to the historical victory of what he called the “horizontal dimension” in the self-understanding of western humankind: the growth of economic and industrial

power, the striving for scientific mastery over nature, the forward thrust into time and space – even now into outer space – “without foreseeable limit.” Man’s intrinsically valid urge to transform the world he encounters, when pursued without an awareness of the dimension of the ultimate and the eternal, ended by transforming man himself into “a thing among things,” “an element in the process of manipulated production and manipulated consumption.” Tillich invoked “our daily life in office and home, in cars and airplanes, at parties and conferences, while reading magazines and watching television, while looking at advertisements and hearing radio” to illustrate the emptiness of a life that “runs ahead,” in which “every moment is filled with something which must be done or seen or said or planned.” Recalling other critiques of “conformity” among the professional-managerial classes by the likes of David Riesman, Erich Fromm, Vance Packard, and William Whyte, Tillich also cited the “influence of the gang mentality on adolescents, of the corporation’s demands on the executives, of the conditioning of everyone by public communication, by propaganda and advertising under the guidance of motivation research” as an example of how “everyone in our social structure is managed, even if one knows it and even if one belongs himself to the managing group.”<sup>2</sup>

Amid a social life thus impoverished of its depths, it was unsurprising that religious symbols – which were originally born out of, and addressed to, those depths – had lost their meaning. In this respect, modern religion itself had erred by

<sup>2</sup> On the postwar cultural critique of “conformity,” pervasive during the 1950s and taken up by the New Left in the 1960s, see Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 183-261; Wilfred McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 226-268; and George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 21-42.

transferring what had been powerful expressions of the dimension of depth into “objects or happenings on the horizontal plane,” where the symbols “lose their power and meaning and become an easy prey to physical, biological, and historical attack.” The symbol of the Fall of Man, for example – “one of the most profound psychological descriptions of the general human predicament” – had once pointed to “the tragic estrangement of man and his world from their true being.” But it had been literalized in the course of Christian and western history into “a story of a human couple a few thousand years ago in what is now present-day Iraq.” Nothing, Tillich wrote, was more symptomatic of the loss of the dimension of depth than the “permanent discussion about the existence or nonexistence of God – a discussion in which both sides are equally wrong, because the discussion itself is wrong and possible only after the loss of the dimension of depth.”

The problem with the religious revival of the 1950s was that it did nothing to recover the dimension of depth. Ministers like Graham and Peale offered people premature answers to the problems of human existence, thereby “making them fit again for the demands of the competitive and conformist society in which we are living” and helping them to “become adapted to the situation which is characterized by the loss of the dimension of depth.” The religious question itself was thus neither asked nor answered. Was a true answer possible? On this point Tillich was paradoxically both tentative and bold. It may be, he speculated, that the answer was simply unavailable: “We may be too deeply steeped in the predicament out of which the question arises to be able to answer it.” And yet the awareness of this predicament was a surer path to an answer than the false certainty that an answer

had already arrived. For: “He who realizes that he is separated from the ultimate source of meaning shows by this realization that he is not only separated but also reunited. And this is just our situation.”

The *Saturday Evening Post* piece represented the apex of Tillich’s public fame in America. It had been a long time coming. Liberal Christianity, one of the most significant cultural projects of the postwar era, experienced the late 1950s and early 1960s simultaneously as a mild crisis and as a period of opening, renewal, reappraisal, possibility: *Aggiornamento*, “bringing up to date,” as the term favored by Catholics had it. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, was undergoing an historic *Aggiornamento* in the early 1960s, driven largely by Pope John XIII’s pontifical program and by the ensuing reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). During the same period, however, mainline Protestants were experiencing a related *Aggiornamento* of their own, although they rarely used that term. The period of robust institution-building, organizational solidity, liberal-ecumenical consolidation, and mainline hegemony that had marked the decade or so after the end of World War II was gradually giving way to an era of ferment, plurality, subjectivity, and politicization.<sup>3</sup> It was a shift, as Robert Ellwood puts it, from religious “modernism” to spiritual “post-modernism” that had implications across the spectrum of American life, well beyond the Establishment precincts of ecumenical Protestantism and not yet fully apparent at the time of Tillich’s death in

<sup>3</sup> For a good overview of this transition, see Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity” in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 18-55.

1965.<sup>4</sup> But as early as the late 1950s, a new mood, a thaw of some kind, was apparent. Within the academic and theological world that he inhabited, this new atmosphere could be felt in the rise of several new trends: a rising political activism on campus with religious foundations, an embrace of “the secular” by younger Protestant intellectuals, a growing interest in non-western religions, and a nascent religious counterculture. This chapter will consider each of these movements in turn, while continuing to use Tillich’s biography and thought as an organizing thread.

For Tillich was closely connected with this freshening of the religious atmosphere that he lived through during his later years: simultaneously an influential source and a sharp critic of the various trends under discussion. On the one hand, he was a crucial progenitor and predecessor of each of these movements, a major influence upon – and, in some cases, a personal mentor to – a number of key religious figures of the time, from James Pike to John A.T. Robinson to Harvey Cox to William Hamilton to Martin Luther King, Jr. His theology of culture and his concept of the “God above God” was an important foundation for secular theology and the various “Death of God” fads that gained outsized notoriety in the mid-1960s. His 1960 voyage to Japan and his various dialogues with representatives of Zen Buddhism belonged to the broader embrace of religious diversity and pluralism by leading ecumenical Protestants. On the other hand, Tillich was frequently critical – and often in a very prescient way – of all these same phenomena. He warned against anti-

<sup>4</sup> Robert Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 10-18.

intellectualism and therapeutic self-absorption among the younger generation of political activists. He was doubtful of secular theology's embrace of pragmatic reason and of what he called the "horizontal dimension." He was skeptical of a dialogue of the world religions that placed all religions on the same level or that excluded what he called the "secular quasi-religions" of humanism, communism, and nationalism. And he was suspicious of the shallow

This dual character of Tillich's public presence was characteristic of his tendency to reserve a place for himself as both a mentor and a gadfly, at once affirming and denying the central religious claims of his time. But more than simply offering him a chance to say "yes" or "no," the various religious trends of Tillich's later years – pluralism, mysticism, secularism, authenticity – provided Tillich with an occasion for the creative renewal of his own thought, even in his very twilight years. For despite the claims of some of its less thoughtful exponents, very little of what appeared innovative and distinctive about Protestant liberalism in the early 1960s was in fact wholly new. In some ways, what happened during the later end of Tillich's life was that he found himself reconsidering themes and questions that had been with him since much earlier in his career, as early as the 1920s. As the great Romanian-American scholar of religion Mircea Eliade remembered of the famed seminar on the History of Religions that he co-taught with Tillich at the University of Chicago in 1964, Eliade initially thought that Tillich was pioneering a new theology

of History of Religions. But he soon decided that "What [Tillich] was accomplishing in our unforgettable evenings was a *renewal of his own Systematic Theology*."<sup>5</sup>

### The Politics of Personalism

The cultural and religious polarization of the past half century or so has contributed to a misleading narrative about "the Sixties" – popular on both the religious right and the secular left – in which the decade's radical social movements were essentially areligious or even anti-religious. But this was not so. Even setting aside the pluralistic spiritual ferment in the counterculture – in mysticism, occultism, shamanism, psychedelics, and other weird and wonderful growths of the time – religion was a pervasive influence upon and within numerous spheres of radical social activism that have retrospectively come to seem straightforwardly secular or narrowly political. Civil Rights, ban-the-bomb pacifism, the Catholic Worker movement, campus radicalism, the antiwar movement: all were steeped, especially during their early years, in the specific milieus and fashions of ecumenical or Social Gospel Christianity, as well as in the more diffuse ethic of what James Farrell calls "postwar personalism." The ambitions of this "here and now revolution" were spiritual and religious as much as they were political.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mircea Eliade, "Paul Tillich and the History of Religions," in Paul Tillich, *The Future of Religions*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 33.

<sup>6</sup> The best description of this aspect of sixties culture is still Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections of the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), but other good treatments include Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, James Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), and Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For a succinct, more journalistic take in this vein, see Jackson Lears, "Aquarius Rising," *The New York Review of Books*, September 27, 2018.



“Personalism,” which has a rarefied theological and philosophical meaning but which Farrell uses to describe a wide-ranging protest against the dehumanization created by American social and political structures, was an important ingredient in the spirit of revolutionary activism that gripped large swaths of young people throughout the decade. Its aim was to effect a union of the personal and the political, to model social change within the revolutionary movements themselves, and to refashion American culture on a scale better fitted to human persons and communities. Its social location was within colleges and universities, in little magazines, among urban bohemias and artistic enclaves, in earnest discussion groups and reading clubs, in the “movement culture” of rising activist groups, and occasionally in churches and para-religious grassroots organizations such as YMCAs, urban ministries, soup kitchens, and the like. Its three main intellectual sources, the union of which Tillich had been attempting to forge throughout his American career, were humanistic psychology, existentialist philosophy, and liberal Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

The spiritual tenor of social activism was most obvious in the case of Civil Rights, where the participation of liberal clergy – white and black; Protestant, Catholic, and Jew – produced iconic images of religious support and solidarity that preserved the social respectability of a movement otherwise vulnerable to accusations of Communism or leftism.<sup>8</sup> Tillich, who signed numerous petitions supportive of racial justice over the years and who in his sermons spoke of “the

<sup>7</sup> Farrell, *Spirit of the Sixties*, 5-20.

<sup>8</sup> David Chapell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 44-86.

racial consciousness” as the defining curse of American history, was not by any means on the front lines of the movement as some of his younger colleagues and students were.<sup>9</sup> Yet his influence could be felt in other, less visible ways. Martin Luther King, Jr. completed his doctoral dissertation at Boston University – some of which he apparently plagiarized from another student – comparing Tillich's ideas of God to those of the University of Chicago's Henry Nelson Wieman, not long before he was launched into the leadership of the Montgomery Bus boycott.<sup>10</sup> King was respectful in his dissertation towards Tillich's idea of God – as the "Ground of Being" or "Being-itself," *esse ipsum* – but also complained that it was too ontological and abstract, insufficiently personal to support the cause of social justice, "akin to the impersonalism of Oriental Vedantism."<sup>11</sup> The two men had a brief correspondence in which Tillich invited the younger man to view as-yet unpublished portions of his *Systematic Theology* and agreed to a personal interview, which never materialized.<sup>12</sup> Later on, in King's famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he cited Tillich's idea of sin as separation to argue for the ultimate sinfulness of segregation: "Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, "The Eternal Now," in *The Eternal Now*, 127.

<sup>10</sup> On the plagiarism controversy around King's doctoral dissertation, see "Boston U. Panel Finds Plagiarism by Dr. King," *New York Times*, October 11, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Abstract of 'A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman,'" in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Claybourne Carson, vol. 1: *Rediscovering Precious Values, June 1951-November 1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 547. Tillich himself – had he ever gotten the chance to read King's dissertation – would no doubt have objected to this characterization; his own arguments with Hindu and Buddhist scholars centered exactly around what he perceived as the lack of a personalistic element in the oriental conception of God. For Tillich, to perceive God as a person was "the basest blasphemy" and yet, "God is the ground of everything personal and carries within himself the ontological power of personality." This seeming paradox lies at the heart of the book that Tillich published around the same time King was finishing his dissertation. See Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 102, 118-19.

estrangement, his terrible sinfulness?"<sup>13</sup> he asked. Upon Tillich's death in 1965, King hailed him, in characteristically oracular tones, as "the intellectual giant of this modern period" who had given the world "a system of meaning and purpose for our lives in an age when war and doubt seriously threatened all that we had come to hold dear."<sup>14</sup>

More generally, Tillich developed a reputation as something of a benevolent mentor – an “elder ‘olympian,’” in the words of one young radical admirer – to the new mood of social disquiet and earnest questioning that could be felt across numerous younger milieus in the early 1960s, especially on the college campuses where he consistently packed chapels, lecture halls, and auditoriums.<sup>15</sup> The height of Tillich's popularity preceded “Don't Trust Anyone Over Thirty.” His enthusiasm for young people, his personal charisma, and his bohemian and socialist background positioned him to play the part well. Particularly refreshing was his unwillingness to rely upon age or experience as a bludgeon against youth. “Wisdom is not bound to old age,” as he stated bluntly in one of his later sermons. “It is found equally in the young. And there are fools at all ages of life.” Later in the sermon, he praised the younger generation’s contempt for mere expertise and empty technique, but in terms that also contained a prescient caution against anti-intellectualism:

The health of the younger generation is demonstrated by the fact that it has experienced and violently expressed the emptiness of knowledge without wisdom. Those who feel dissatisfied with learning facts without an

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in *Why We Can't Wait*, ed. Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Dell, 1964), 82-3.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Statement on the Death of Paul Tillich,” October 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers, 1950–1968, Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, Ga.

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Wood to Paul Tillich, March 16, 1963, PTP, bMS 649/206. For Tillich’s popularity on campus, see Paul Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 141-6 and Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 58-68.

understanding of their meaning, and those who feel the emptiness of the possession of knowledge without wisdom are most important in our academic and national society. May they never cease to express this feeling! May they force us, the older ones, to listen! But we shall *only* listen, if contempt of knowledge and scholarship does not color their complaints; then we shall try with all that is given to us to become their helpers on the road to wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

Although Tillich slowed down in his ability to keep up with the latest books and artistic trends in his later years, he always made an effort to read new literature by younger writers and was impressed by several of the Beats such as Allen Ginsburg and Norman Mailer. "There seems to be a new uncompromising insistence on the part of young people to face reality," he told his secretary Grace Leonard upon reading Lawrence Ferlinghetti's profane verses about the crucifixion of Jesus in *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958), "no matter how ugly it may be."<sup>17</sup> In general, he was unfazed by "shocking" or oppositional stances, having been surrounded by much worse during World War I, in his Weimar young adulthood, and more or less continuously from his wife.

Tillich belonged to a whole cohort of radical American writers, critics, and intellectuals of the 1950s – other prominent examples included Erich Fromm, William Whyte, C. Wright Mills, Vance Packard, and David Riesman – whose critiques of managerial authority, "mass man," "other-direction," and, above all, "conformity" became basic ingredients in the emergent individualism of the New Left and whose sudden status as mentors to youthful non-conformity in the 1960s came as a welcome surprise to them. It was a surprise because to many of these

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, "On Wisdom," in *The Eternal Now*, 163, 165.

<sup>17</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 23.

figures young people had seemed the worst exemplars of the blandness, emptiness, shallowness, and status-seeking they considered characteristic of American society as a whole. In a graduation address to the New School for Social Research in 1958, "Do Not Be Conformed," Tillich noted the "mood of conservatism" that "permeates large sections of mankind" and worried over the possibility that "the motto of the new generation" would be "not transformation, but conformity." To blame was the relentless socialization processes at work in schools, workplaces, churches, and other institutions, as well as "the pressures exerted by suburban neighborhoods, by the laws of competition, by political threats, and by radio and TV filling our air waves twenty-four hours daily and impressing our unconscious even as we try to resist them in our conscious center."<sup>18</sup>

Conformity, Tillich charged, was inculcated

starting in school days, when some teachers prevent individual friendships because they threaten "adjustments" (this fallacious principle of education), on through the years when the laws of the gang are more important for the youngster than all divine and human laws together, through the years in the institutes of higher learning where the standards imposed by older upon younger students allow the most extravagant behavior; through the years of entrance into the world of adult competition and adaptation to the means of success, through the years of maturity and power and the fear of violating social, political and religious taboos, and through the later years of one's life when religious propagandists use the fear of the approaching end to preach new forms of old religious conformisms. All these stages of our life are accompanied by incessant pressure from the communications media, one of whose functions is to produce conformity without letting people even become aware of it.<sup>19</sup>

This critique struck a chord among some students themselves, who responded to Tillich's visits to their campuses in effusive letters of praise and thanks and

<sup>18</sup> Tillich, "Do Not Be Conformed," in *The Eternal Now*, 135-6, 142.

<sup>19</sup> Tillich, "Do Not Be Conformed," in *The Eternal Now*, 136.

sometimes echoed his concern about the younger generation. "It is so good – so very, very good – to have a man – a real, live man – discuss feeling sensuously about God and His universe, including man," wrote one young woman from the University of Santa Barbara after one of Tillich's teaching stints there. "Yesterday, you mentioned the inner 'emptiness' you saw on college campuses – oh, Paul Tillich – that glassy, varnished 'emptiness' seems so omnipresent. In our age group – the junior chamber of commerce ages of 20-35 – it is so aggressive – this flippant, shallow point-of-view toward love, children, home, country, God." Anyone who "feels deeply about the preciousness of love between man and woman" or who "feels deeply that divine love is Being," she complained, "is so definitely an odd ball ...and an odd ball can get lonesome, by George!!"<sup>20</sup>

Visible here are glimpses of an emergent oppositional culture on campus that defined itself, at least in early days, by generational alienation rather than generational solidarity – and that looked back to the older generation for guidance. In 1964, the leader of a Christian fellowship group felt "compelled to implore" Tillich to make a visit to the University of Connecticut, despite the limited likelihood that he would be able to fill out the 3,000-capacity auditorium (a feat of which only Peter, Paul, and Mary were capable). "Implore may seem too strong a term," the student added, "however UConn is a campus characterized by every critical term in the book, and needs to have fresh ideas concerning all facets of their life, and perhaps some foundation for that life too. We are apathetic, performance oriented, other-directed, lonely, alienated, bourgeois, anti-intellectual, poorly informed, and poorly

<sup>20</sup> Mary Elizabeth Matti to Paul Tillich, March 1963, PTP, bMS 649/164.

read. We need to awaken.” Tillich thanked the student for this “tragico comical letter” but had to decline the invitation due to his age and his numerous other engagements. “With great regret,” he signed the letter, “(but no reason for crying).”<sup>21</sup>

As the 1950s turned into the 1960s, the increasing frequency of these kinds of responses to his thought seemed to make Tillich aware of an atmosphere of thaw and ferment. John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency in 1960 – which Tillich supported but with reservations, some of them concerning Kennedy's Roman Catholicism – signaled the beginning of a new era of prestige and ostensible influence for public intellectuals, symbolized most famously by the presence of artists and writers from John Steinbeck to Mark Rothko to Robert Frost at the new president's inauguration in 1961. Tillich, too, was present on the presidential inauguration dais, with a good view, as he told his friends, of Jacqueline Kennedy's profile.<sup>22</sup> Afterwards, he wrote to the president expressing his satisfaction about the first couple's “desire to cooperate with representatives of the arts and sciences.” This much-touted “Camelot” atmosphere – the idea of the youthful and stylish Kennedy as a patron of culture, presiding over the return to high intellectual standards and taste in Washington – did little to alter the president's often reckless geopolitical brinksmanship or technocratic domestic policy and was contradicted moreover by the reality of his personal indifference towards art and culture. Tillich's embrace of the Camelot myth was in line with his general flirtation with publicity and fame, which occasionally got the better of him. But if the Camelot idea

<sup>21</sup> Theodore N. Clark to Paul Tillich, October 31, 1964 and Paul Tillich to Theodore N. Clark, November 18, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/130.

<sup>22</sup> Grace Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 134.

was mostly hype, it did at least encourage the return to outspokenness of some figures who had been in political hibernation since the days of Joseph McCarthy. Tillich, who had stayed in the public eye but withdrawn from saying much about politics after his bruising experience with the Americans for a Democratic Germany, was certainly affected by this atmosphere of thaw. As he wrote in his letter to Kennedy, the president's invitation had encouraged him "to become more active in political thought as a writer, philosopher, and theologian. The feeling I have had during the last 12 years that such participation had no consequence was considerably reduced by this invitation."<sup>23</sup>

As it turned out, the main episode of Tillich's Kennedy-inspired return to politics featured him as a critic of the president's foreign policy and of America's Cold War's strategic mandarinat. At the height of the Berlin crisis in late 1961, when the Soviet Union threatened to occupy West Berlin in order to stop the flow of refugees from East Germany and when war, even global nuclear war, seemed briefly possible, Tillich sat on a televised panel discussion, "Prospects of Mankind" for National Educational Television, the precursor to PBS.<sup>24</sup> Introduced by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and moderated by Eleanor Roosevelt, the discussion also included a young Henry Kissinger, a professor at Harvard at the time, and James Reston, the *New York Times's* chief Washington correspondent known for his closeness with the Kennedy White House. In this strange and uncomfortable debate, a clearly

<sup>23</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 256.

<sup>24</sup> *Prospects of Mankind with Eleanor Roosevelt*, "Berlin: What Choices Remain," dir. Gene Nichols, Boston: WGBH Boston, 1961. All subsequent quotations and descriptions of the episode are taken from this source.



nervous Tillich took the position that the United States should under no circumstances use nuclear weapons unless the Soviet Union used them first. As he made evident in a memo accompanying his appearance on the program, this stance did not imply pacifism, nor did it preclude other, more conventional uses of military force to defend Western Europe, although Tillich conceded that the Soviets probably had the capacity to overrun Berlin and parts of Western Europe with conventional arms, at least initially. He did not even deny the possibility of America's having to use nuclear weapons as a deterrent against their first use by the Soviets – a scenario in which mankind would have “had this moment of providence in which it destroyed itself. And then all human possibilities are gone.” A nuclear first-strike by the United States, however, could not be justified because it “produces destruction without the possibility of a new beginning. It annihilates what it is supposed to defend.” This seemingly unexceptionable position was one that no one on the panel, minus Eleanor Roosevelt, was willing to entertain. Kissinger complained that “if we commit ourselves in advance, never to use nuclear weapons in such circumstances we are in effect not only dooming ourselves to lose in Europe in case of an attack. I would even suggest that we are encouraging an attack, we will give the Soviets no other option except to attack.”

After the program aired, Reston wrote a column in the *New York Times*, “Kennedy in the Middle on the German Debate” that cast Kennedy as occupying a “middle ground between those who would negotiate nothing and those who would risk giving up everything.” The former were America's western European allies, especially West Germany, who pressed for a firmer anti-Soviet line.

In the latter group he put Tillich, whose position was “more sincere but more dangerous.” Raising the specter of the pacifistic idealism of “ministers” who “accept defeat on ethical grounds,” Reston invoked the words of Tillich's former colleague Reinhold Niebuhr: “If the democratic nations fail, their failure must partly be attributed to the faulty strategy of idealists who have too many illusions when they face realists who have too little conscience.” Reston also echoed Kissinger's point from the discussion: “For if Dr. Tillich's ardent plea were widely accepted in this Government and country, nothing would be surer than that the Russians would use their conventional power to conquer Germany and march to the North Sea. Then we would be faced with the ‘moment of providence’ Dr. Tillich is hoping to avoid.”

Except that the “moment of providence” to which Tillich referred was not the loss of Western Europe but rather total nuclear apocalypse the world over. In the televised discussion itself, Tillich rejected the premise that to accept a temporary retreat in the contest for Europe – as the Allied powers had done during World War II – was to “doom free Europe to slavery,” as one of the other panelists put it. “Why do we in this war not first be imaginative enough to think of a war of liberation as they have been done so often?” he asked. “Why is that slavery if we have a heavy defeat in the beginning? That's not slavery – only when we say ‘we have given in.’ But we don't give in.” The question was not whether to accept a Soviet occupation of Western Europe but rather whether a nuclear strike could be justified “to avoid a retreat, which, anyhow, all great nations have done in some situations, in every war, and especially the British have done almost in every war – and finally they won the war.” When another panelist asked Tillich whether he believed that freedom should

be defended with “all the power that we have,” Tillich responded, “All the power that we have – except that power which destroys the foundations for all power and for all freedom, namely the human beings and the nations that live there.”

The absolutist talk by the other panelists of “freedom” and slavery,” which clearly rankled Tillich, pointed to a larger difference in perspectives that, as the decade went on, increasingly defined clashes between the Cold War “Establishment” – even in its liberal form – and the nascent countercultural radicalism. For Tillich's entire approach to politics was informed by an acute human sensitivity, perceptiveness, and gentleness that did not fit neatly into Cold War certainties, that was often critical of western capitalism's corrosive effects on the human spirit, and that was jarringly out of place amid allegedly hard-nosed debates over strategy and negotiation and nuclear payloads. This discordance became apparent on the “Prospects of Mankind” program when Tillich was asked for his observations about the mood of the German people, especially Berliners, as the crisis had escalated. Tillich, who had visited Germany every other year since 1948 and kept up an extensive correspondence with his German friends and family members, reported that enthusiasm over West Germany's so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*, or “economic miracle,” concealed an undercurrent of anxiety over “the materialistic influence of all people thinking there.” In Berlin, meanwhile, the recent erection of the wall by the Soviets had induced a “profoundly depressed feeling” in a city where – despite the presence of multiple occupying powers, checkpoints, and all manner of other daily inconveniences – the mood since the end of the war had been “the best, and the most courageous, and the most gay, in some way, even,” due in large part to the

city's sense of vocation "as a gateway between East and West." The wall had taken away this mediating function and had left Berlin as a potentially "dead city" asking itself, "For what do we exist? For what do we stand all these miseries which are connected with our prison existence?"

Reston pounced that he was "troubled by this line of argument." Berliners need not be worried about a purpose in life, he claimed, for "freedom is the purpose. I do not see that commerce that went through the Brandenburg Gate from the West Berlin and East Berlin is a greater purpose than their continuing to live on there as the symbol of freedom in a vast wasteland of tyranny." Tillich did not respond, except with exasperated body language, but he may have had this exchange in mind a year later when he traveled to Berlin and spoke on the philosophically and politically fertile topic of "Frontiers." Among the other "boundary lines" on which Tillich asked his listeners to stand was "the frontier toward the East": "It is wrong when the Western peoples are prevented by education, literature and propaganda from crossing this frontier, which is erected not only in Berlin. We must also see what is going on in depth over there, and seek to understand it from a human standpoint—not just polemically. And I wish I were capable of saying that to those on the other side of the line, too."<sup>25</sup>

Yet if Tillich's humane personalism sometimes brought him into alignment with the new mood on college campuses and, more rarely, into confrontation with the Cold War national security state, there were limits to his support for youthful radicalism and counterculture. He no doubt would have become more and more

<sup>25</sup> Paul Tillich, "Frontiers," in *The Future of Religions*, 57.

uncomfortable – and perhaps would simply have withdrawn – had he lived to see the campus upheavals of 1968 and after. He was too much of a traditionalist and a believer in academic authority to have played the role of countercultural guru embraced by insider-outsider figures like Paul Goodman or his friend Herbert Marcuse. In 1964, an editor from Pantheon Books requested that Tillich contribute an essay to a book on “the gap between the post-war generation and its elders,” addressing the question, “what can we still tell our children?”; Tillich, ignoring the editor's claim that he was “one of the few people whose life work we feel today's young people can still respect,” demurred: “not only because of lack of time,” he wrote, “but also because I am not aware of the feelings and ideas of the younger generation.”<sup>26</sup> This was an overstatement of almost comic proportions: Tillich was regularly lecturing and meeting with undergraduates, whose appreciation for him is evident from the many letters he received. “Your interest in undergraduate students like myself,” as one wrote, “shows the insight which you have into the tensions we experience. It is enlightening to know that a great intellectual figure, such as yourself, has concern for the younger generation as we search for solutions to our own existential problems.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as the Pantheon editor pointed out, Tillich had two children of his own with whom he had a warm relationship.

Still, there was some truth in his rueful self-assessment. Mutie and Rene, born respectively in 1926 and 1933, were older than the baby-boom generation – to whom Tillich related as more of a kindly grandfather than as a father figure. And

<sup>26</sup> André Schiffrin to Paul Tillich, January 21, 1964, and Paul Tillich to André Schiffrin, January 29, 1964, folder marked “Pantheon Books,” PTP, bMS 649/173.

<sup>27</sup> Jo Carole MacKay to Paul Tillich, February 24, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/163.

even in his orientation towards his children, Tillich revealed an ambiguous set of traits as a mentor and elder. As Rene describes their relationship in his brief memoir of his father, Tillich could be warm, tolerant, and advisory, but also often circumspect, absent, and preoccupied. When Rene, who was doing graduate work in psychology at UC-Berkley, once asked his father to sign a petition for the Free Speech Movement, then coalescing under the leadership of Mario Savio and amid the nascent New Left ethos of “participatory democracy,” Tillich declined, saying “No, one must not sign everything, one loses one's power.” When Rene hatched the idea of moving to Hawaii, Tillich, in Rene's words, “indicated some concern that my brain might rot out in the relaxed atmosphere of the tropics, but, as always, he accepted.”<sup>28</sup> When his young editor Elisabeth Wood at Harper and Row implored Tillich to address the Civil Rights movement in his 1963 book on ethics, *Morality and Beyond* – sending him a copy of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and writing pointedly that “to omit any discussion of the race question in even the shortest commentary on modern ethics is a sign of ‘not listening to the concrete situation’” – Tillich's response was brisk and decisive: “I didn't go into the race-problem because I didn't discuss any concrete ethical question and if I had done one, I would have had to do others, for instance the atomic war problem, which I consider is at least equal in significance.”<sup>29</sup>

Tillich believed there were real dangers, moreover, in a relentlessly adversarial stance towards parental, educational, or institutional authorities. In his

<sup>28</sup> Rene Tillich, *My Father*, *Paul Tillich*, 12-13, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Elisabeth Wood to Paul Tillich, March 16, 1963 and Paul Tillich to Elisabeth Wood, April 4, 1963, PTP, bMS 649/206.

commencement speech at the New School in 1958, Tillich warned that “we may be conformist not only if we agree but also if we disagree, and we may be non-conformist not only if we disagree but also if we agree.” He added: “These are words of warning for those of us who believe that their revolutionary thrust liberates us from the danger of conformism. For it does not.” In the end, Tillich advised, each individual must answer the question of conforming or not conforming as an individual. And this answer is always “a risk, burdened with struggles within our own conscience.” An act of resistance, he pointed out, may well be driven by “our awareness of corruption”; equally, it may be rooted in “a wrong conformity to ourselves.” An act of submission to elders or family members, meanwhile, may be “based on a wrong surrender”; equally, it may be an expression of “love and wisdom.” He concluded: “We do not know these things with certainty, and we can act only at the risk of being wrong. But act we must.”<sup>30</sup>

It was this existentialist idea of assuming the courage to decide for oneself, even if the decision should prove a failure, where Tillich’s influence and legacy could be felt most directly and meaningfully in the early environs of the New Left. In reality it was an atmosphere as much as it was an idea, pervasive in the new activism on campus – and for which Tillich was by no means the only source – emphasizing decision, commitment, authenticity, and courage: all antidotes to the perceived alienation, conformism, and anxiety of life in general and of suburban postwar American life in particular. “Courage,” indeed, was the word most commonly associated with Tillich’s reputation among students, not only because he

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, “Do Not Be Conformed,” in *The Eternal Now*, 140.

manifestly had it in spades but also because of his authorship of *The Courage to Be*. The book was a genuine phenomenon; well into the 1960s, heavily underlined and dog-eared copies of the paperback edition could be seen, like Camus's *The Stranger*, jutting out of rear pockets on college campuses.<sup>31</sup> In the context of campus activism it meant the courage to be on the picket line, in the march, at the sit-in. But Tillich framed *The Courage to Be* as having a universal, indeed ontological, significance beyond any special situation and including, but also transcending, physical courage. Because it did not specify specific "contents," this courage was unstable and unpredictable as a political force. It could also be very vague.

As Doug Rossinow has shown in his study of New Left activism at the University of Texas, Tillich was a name to be contended with among the Christian campus ministries and discussion groups that morphed into Students for a Democratic Society and other New Left organizations.<sup>32</sup> In general, the campus existentialism of the 1960s has been abused by critics, on both right and left, who claim it fostered a merely private and therapeutic focus and amounted to little more than empty intellectual posturing, vacuous self-talk, and narcissism. No doubt this critique was justified in some cases, although it is difficult to blame Tillich for the uses to which his name and reputation were put. Paul Lee, who later became one of Tillich's teaching assistants at Harvard, tells a funny story about hearing Tillich lecture for the first time at St. Olaf's college in Minnesota on existentialism; Lee and his roommates "didn't understand a word," but argued "long and loud into the night

<sup>31</sup> See Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties*, 141-6.

<sup>32</sup> Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 59-68.



over whether it was important that we didn't get it and whether what was said was important if we didn't get it." Lee added: "I was certain it was important. Tillich was one of the most impressive figures I had ever heard."<sup>33</sup>

Another student, who had read *The Courage to Be* and was writing his senior thesis on existential psychiatry ("it was not going well"), saw Tillich speak at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1963, had a brief conversation with him after the lecture, and wrote to him admitting that he had "understood very little of what I read." But Tillich's presence nevertheless somehow contributed to the resolution of some recondite personal crisis and constituted a "turning point" in his life:

It was not the content of what you said though this had its effect. For the first time in my life I felt that I could take or leave what was said as I felt it. ... The specific question I asked you in the elevator at the Wisconsin Union did not have personal significance. The asking did. For one of the few times in life I felt that you were no looming authority figure. I felt, in one sense, a human sense, equal. I am no convert as such to your views. I am at not some crackpot who writes letters to every "famous" person. You did not change me. But you did share in this change. For this I thank you. <sup>34</sup>

This sort of thing seems to have been what Tillich had in mind when he criticized the pervasive "search for identity" – popularized by his Harvard colleague and friend Erik Erikson – among young people, which he took as an expression of "a period in which many are incapable of finding the essential limit in and beyond their passing factual limits, and not just along as individuals, but also as members of society—national, cultural, religious."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Lee, "Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage."

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Hoffmann to Paul Tillich, May 23, 1963, PTP, BMS 649/153.

<sup>35</sup> Tillich, "Fronteirs," in *The Future of Religions*, 58.

## Secular Theology and the New Breed

The zeitgeist of Protestant liberalism the early to mid-sixties was shaped by a younger generation of religious intellectuals – clergy, laypeople, theologians – that Harvey Cox, one of the most famous among them, would identify in 1967 as a "new breed" in American churches.<sup>36</sup> Galvanized by the emergent activism of the Civil Rights and antiwar movements, drawn to the pluralism and ecumenism generated by Vatican II, and sympathetic to the concerns of middle-class students and young people, the new breed argued for openhanded engagement with the secular world and put this belief into practice through media appearances, bestselling books, outspokenness on current events and political issues, and public religious-countercultural "happenings." Its style was informal, upbeat, earnest, "cool" – a religious counterpart to the New Frontier spirit of President Kennedy's administration. Its main ideas were marked out by a series of books – John A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God* (1961), Ralph Dodge's *The Unpopular Missionary* (1964), Malcolm Boyd's *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* (1965), Cox's *The Secular City* (1965) – as well as catchphrases: the "open church," a "world come of age," and the "death of God." (Or, indeed, "the God above God.")<sup>37</sup>

At its best, the new breed represented the social conscience of America's historic mainline churches; at its worst, it presented the spectacle of a fading cultural elite making a strained bid for relevance. Like the early student New Left,

<sup>36</sup> Harvey Cox, "The 'New Breed' in American Churches: Sources of Social Activism in American Religion," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 135-150.

<sup>37</sup> Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, 104-175; Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 25-8.

the new breed was indebted to the social thought, cultural criticism, and theology of the generation that preceded it – the Niebuhr and Tillich generation. And yet they evinced an impatience with the solemnity, aestheticism, and interiority of their theological elders. In a celebrated article registering this spirit of “new optimism” in 1964, the theologian William Hamilton complained that “the tragic sense of life went along quite well with good manners, nice clothes, sensitivity to interpersonal relations, and a good conscience about the rat-race.” It was ironic, Hamilton pointed out, that neo-orthodoxy, born as a radical protest against liberal conformism,

became one of the fashionable ideologies for the Eisenhower period in American intellectual life -- that time when men sagely advised us that the real battle was not bohemia or radical politics or ideology, but the mystery of the inner life. Old Niebuhrians tended to go to the back pages of the *National Review* to die. Inner submission, prudent realism, accepting with maturity the tragic structures – all of these styles of the fifties were as readily being justified by neo-orthodox theology as by anti-communism or psychoanalysis.<sup>38</sup>

The shift in mood was increased sense of the possibilities of human action, human happiness, human decency, in this life.”

Hamilton's attack on the "neo-orthodox-ecumenical-biblical-kerygmatic theology" was aimed more against Niebuhr than against Tillich, whom Hamilton actually knew and admired. But Tillich was unquestionably included in the new breed's general disparagement of postwar inwardness – “inner submission, prudent realism, accepting with maturity the tragic structures,” in Hamilton's words – and he sometimes took his attacks from them more directly as well.<sup>39</sup> Harvey Cox criticized

<sup>38</sup> William Hamilton, “The New Optimism – From Prufrock to Ringo,” in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, ed. William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer (Indiannapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966).

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton, “The New Optimism.”

Tillich in *The Secular City* (1965) for the assumption that “man by his very nature *must* ask ... 'ultimate' or existential questions.” Cox's immensely popular book was a brief for the worldview of what he called “pragmatic man,” the prototype of which was John F. Kennedy and the central concerns of which were utilitarian and secular rather than “ultimate” or “religious.” Cox urged his readers, instead of indulging in meaningless God-talk, to focus on “liberating the captives.” Social change, technological advance, urbanization, and McLuhanite globalization were converging to produce a new epoch that superseded the need for existential dread altogether. Here was the apotheosis of what Tillich had referred to as the “horizontal dimension.” Contrary to Tillich, questions of ultimate meaning do not inhere in the structure of existence as such; instead, in Cox's view, they “arise from the erosion of inherited world-views and cultural meanings” and “express the shock and terror of those who wake in the night to find that their whole theistic faith has been built on a conjecture.” Existentialism, Cox claimed, was symptom of bourgeois decadence, “since its categories of *Angst* and vertigo seem increasingly irrelevant to the ethos of the new epoch.”<sup>40</sup>

The harshness of their critique of Tillich was somewhat deceptive, for there were deep ties between him and the new breed. As one of *The Secular City*'s early reviewers wrote, Cox's “lack of appreciation of [Tillich's] pioneering in the whole area of the theology of culture borders on the scandalous.”<sup>41</sup> Tillich, in fact, had been

<sup>40</sup> Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 95-6, 268.

<sup>41</sup> Max Stackhouse, “Today's City: Threat or Promise?” in *The Secular City Debate*, ed. Daniel Callahan (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 32.

Cox's mentor at Harvard Divinity School; his ideas on the relationship between religion and secular culture, which dated back to the 1920s but found their fullest expression in his collection of essays *The Theology of Culture* (1959), were foundational to the entire field of secular theology and indeed provided a central warrant for the turn towards secular culture and politics among the younger mainline clergy of the early 1960s.<sup>42</sup> One of Tillich's signature phrases from his lecturing and teaching – "Religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion" – became something of a mantra for this movement in its inception. The essence of the idea was that at the root of all human endeavor, activity, and creativity – whether secular or religious – lies an "ultimate concern," a vision of what is unconditionally important and sublime. In this sense, all culture is "religious." Another catchphrase: "the Holy is the depth of the common." If one takes the underlying unity of all existence seriously, in other words, there is nothing in life that is not an expression of that unity, including secular culture and (perhaps especially) secular criticism of religion.

The word "religion," in Tillich's view, was itself ambiguous, referring both to a special sphere of human cultural activity – churches, institutions, doctrines, piety, devotion, etc. – that changes over time in response to all manner of psychological and sociological needs; but religion also refers to the dimension of depth in all realms of life: physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, artistic, ethical. Despite this underlying unity, however, culture is tragically divided into "secular"

<sup>42</sup> For a later, more measured and mature statement by Cox of his debts to Tillich, see his preface to the third edition of *The Courage To Be*, xi-xxv.

and “religious” realms. The existence of “religion” in the narrower sense – that of concrete symbols, churches, practices, myths, dogmas – is a concession to the estrangement of life from its own ground and depth. In the state of true union, the distinction between the secular and the religious is dissolved; hence, in the biblical vision of the apocalypse from the Book of Revelation, there are no temples in the heavenly Jerusalem because God is all in all. There is no secular realm, and for this very reason there is no religious realm. The glory of religious institutions and practices is that they “open up the depth of man’s spiritual life which is usually covered by the dust of our daily life and the noise of our secular work.” The corresponding shame of religion, again in the narrower sense of the word, is that it “makes its myths and doctrines, its rites and laws into ultimates and persecutes those who do not subject themselves to it.” It forgets that its own existence as a separate sphere is a tragedy. “It forgets its own emergency character.”<sup>43</sup>

This line of thinking – which of course was present in Tillich's writings throughout his career – became increasingly prominent in liberal theological circles during the early 1960s, in what came to be called “secular theology.” One of the earliest and most visible examples of the genre was John A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963), the surprise bestseller by the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich that argued for an updated image of God based on Tillich's notion of the “Ground of Being” and that generated so much controversy that a companion volume, *The Honest to God Debate* (1963), was published in its wake.<sup>44</sup> Alongside Tillich's ideas about

<sup>43</sup> Paul Tillich, “Religion as a Dimension in Man’s Spiritual Life,” in *Theology of Culture*, 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> David L. Edwards, ed., *The Honest to God Debate: Some Reactions to the Book “Honest to God” with a New Chapter by its Author John A.T. Robinson Bishop of Woolwich* (London: Westminster Press, 1963).

God, *Honest to God* also popularized Dietrich Bonhoeffer's idea of "religionless Christianity" and Rudolph Bultmann's concept of "demythologization." The aim was a new "image" of the modern Christian: worldly, mature, freethinking, and immersed in the problems and possibilities of secular culture. Upon the book's publication, Tillich wrote to Robinson asking whether they had ever met before but also congratulating him on the book's success. "You express in a language understandable to many people, what I myself can communicate only to a comparatively few," wrote Tillich. Robinson responded reminding Tillich of their several earlier meetings and expressing relief that Tillich did not think his ideas had been misrepresented. The controversy around the book – it was attacked as heretical by traditionalists and Anglo-Catholics especially – did not bother Robinson, for, as he wrote to Tillich, "fundamentally I am more than encouraged by the response that I have had precisely from these sort of people to whom I was really addressing myself - namely, thinking young people inside and outside our Churches."<sup>45</sup>

Yet for all that these trends owed to Tillich's influence, the main representatives of the new breed were not wrong in sensing a gap in sensibility between him and them, one that became especially evident in Tillich's final public lecture – "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian" – given at the University of Chicago the day before he suffered the heart attack that claimed his life ten days later. In this final lecture, Tillich took aim at what he called

<sup>45</sup> Paul Tillich to John A. T. Robinson, April 10, 1963, and Robinson to Tillich, April 23, 1963, PTP, bMS 649/179.

the “‘God is dead’ oracle” or “the paradox of a religion of non-religion, or a theology without theos, also called a theology of the secular.” Those who studied the history of religions, the subject of Tillich's talk and the focus of his recent seminars with Eliade, “must stand against the no-God-language theology” as well as the idea that historical religions can “be neglected by a secular theologian in the same way he probably neglects the history of magic or of astrology.” It was quite well for secular theologians “to say that the Holy, or the Ultimate, or the Word is within the secular realm” – an argument that Tillich himself had made “innumerable times,” as he pointed out. But it did not follow that “the sacred has, so to speak, been fully absorbed by the secular.” For the sacred is not identical with the secular and in some ways stands as “a critical judgment of the secular. The distinction between the sacred and the profane – between religion and non-religion – may perhaps be a tragic consequence of human estrangement that is finally overcome within the divine life, but it is always present in the life here below. Religion “as a structure of symbols of intuition and action,” of “myths and rites within a social group,” will always remain necessary because “spirit requires embodiment in order to become real and effective.”<sup>46</sup>

The “optimism” of the new breed, moreover – and of young people more generally – threatened to recreate the facile utopianism of the Social Gospel Protestantism Tillich and Niebuhr had battled in the 1930s and 40s: the expectation that the Kingdom of God could be realized within history, in the sociopolitical here

<sup>46</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,” in *The Future of Religions*, 80, 82-84.



and now. Like the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth to which they were superficially opposed, moreover, the secular theologians made the mistake of eliminating everything from Christianity “except the figure of Jesus of Nazareth.” While the Barthians had done so by devaluing the secular and by locating revelation only in the Christ-event, secular theologians such as Cox did the same thing by making Jesus “the representative of a theologically relevant secularity.” This was only possible if “the picture and message of Jesus is itself drastically reduced” to “an embodiment of the ethical call, especially in the social direction.” Tillich proposed breaking through “the Jesus-centered alliance of the opposite poles, the orthodox as well as the secular” with what he referred to as a “Religion of the Concrete Spirit.”

If Tillich was resistant to the trendiness of “secular theology,” the “Death of God,” and other shiny objects of the early 60s religious scene, however, the national prominence he enjoyed in his later years derived from the same publicity apparatus that had turned figures like Robinson, Cox, Hamilton, or James Pike, the controversial Anglican bishop of California, into minor celebrities. He was, in some sense, the prototype of the publicity-savvy religious renegades of the 1960s like Cox or Daniel and Philip Berrigan. Liberal theology had a complicated, if brief, relationship to fame in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Religion, even theology, was “hot” in the news media – with a prominent place even for representatives of the theological avant-garde. Tillich once referred to this phenomenon as “the magazine concept of religion—even the *Time* concept of religion—namely, religion as one of the cultural functions of man's spirit reported, for instance, between economy and

sports.”<sup>47</sup> Henry Luce's personal interest in the world of mainline Protestantism – derived from a childhood in China as the son of Presbyterian missionaries – ensured that *Time* posted a strong roster of religion writers and featured a string of theologians on its cover, including Tillich in 1959.<sup>48</sup> The tone of coverage when confronted with radical clergymen advancing challenging theological concepts, however, veered between breathlessness, curiosity, and “gee-whiz” novelty – not unlike the news media's approach to the nascent counterculture. “Is God Dead?” was the question posed, in red type over a black background, on one of *Time*'s most notorious covers in April 1966, six months after Tillich's death. The story, which featured “Christian atheist” theologians such as Hamilton, Thomas Altizer, and Paul van Buren, generated a massive outcry from the magazine's readers – an outcome which may have been part of the article's point in the first place.<sup>49</sup>

Tillich's relationship to the modest celebrity that came to him late in his life was somewhat more restrained than his younger colleagues, but similarly ambiguous. On the one hand, he undoubtedly basked in the attention and adulation that came to him as a result of his success, and at times seemed to buy into the hype surrounding his reputation and image. In what is probably the harshest characterization of their biography, the Paucks state that in later years Tillich “became less and less able to resist exaggerated praise, contemporary fads, the wiles of publicity, and the magnetism of wealth. At times he was strangely inflexible and omniscient in his manner; he sometimes assumed the pose of the ‘famous man’

<sup>47</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Ambiguity of Perfection,” *Time* 81, no. 20 (May 17, 1963), 70.

<sup>48</sup> “To Be Or Not To Be,” *Time* 73, no. 11 (March 16, 1959), 49.

<sup>49</sup> “Is God Dead?” *Time* 87, no. 14 (April 8, 1966),

glancing Narcissus-like at his own image.”<sup>50</sup> The immense pressure he faced to play the part of “famous man” is evident in Tillich's fan mail, which includes numerous earnest letters seeking out answers to life's big questions from him – for example: “How can one develop this acceptance of death? Or is death an acute fear that we must simply live with? Can you contemplate your own death philosophically?” Tillich responded to this correspondent that he found her letter “moving,” but that “To answer your questions would request a whole book.” He recommended some other of his writings, including his collections of sermons, “in which your questions are directly or indirectly answered.”<sup>51</sup>

Also among Tillich's fan mail are numerous requests for blurbs, reviews, quotations, autographs, and other memorabilia, some of which attention no doubt went to his head. One such request, from the president of the Rainbow Angling Club in Portland, Oregon, wished to include Tillich's signed photograph among a gallery of other distinguished personages in the club's "special memorial lounge." A list of the other figures to be featured in this "Republic Room" gives a sense of the company to which Tillich – or his image, at any rate – belonged:

Your personally signed picture will be displayed with such illustrious luminaries as Presidents Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy; Generals Douglas MacArthur and George Marshall; Admirals Nimitz, Halsey and Leahy; Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Vannevar Bush, Dr. Ralph Bunche, Henry Ford II, Dr. Jonas Salk, Vice Presidents Nixon and Johnson; Bernard Baruch, Carl Sandburg, Henry Cabot Lodge, Mary "Grandma" Moses, Thomas Dewey, Adlai Stevenson, Dr. Billy Graham, Rev. Fulton Sheen, Dr. Eugene C. Blake, Francis Cardinal Spellman, Dr. Franklin C. Fry and The Rt. Rev. John Murray, to mention only a few.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 274-5.

<sup>51</sup> Daisy Akin to Paul Tillich, October 31, 1963, and Tillich to Daisy Akin, n.d., PTP, bMS 649/116.

<sup>52</sup> George Sanders to Paul Tillich, October 24, 1963, PTP, bMS 649/181.

The apotheosis of the “famous man” came in 1963, when Henry Luce invited Tillich to give the address at *Time* magazine's fortieth anniversary gala, held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City: an event attended by 248 individuals, from Joe Louis to Milton Berle to Hubert Humphrey to Bette Davis, who had been featured on the magazine's cover. A lover of parties, Tillich threw himself into the festivities. The Paucks describe his attendance at this “who's who” extravaganza: “As if unaware of all he had said on many occasions about the crisis of capitalism and bourgeois culture, the avowed religious socialist willingly mingled with the wealthy, influential men who represented this civilization, accepting their applause and favors.”<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Tillich was acutely aware of the pitfalls of fame, and often admitted privately that he felt like a phony.<sup>54</sup> The strain of being seen as a “wise man,” an authority on the great human questions, especially when his own personal life so often felt in disarray, was unbearable to him. The psychologist Robert Coles, remembering the seminar he took with him at Harvard, described Tillich as “the careful and learned scholar who at times realized all too well that he himself had been elevated in the minds of some to the deity: yet another of America's authorities, relentlessly hounded for whatever pontifical assertions he happened to have available at any given moment.”<sup>55</sup> His most effective way of coping with this pressure seems to have been humor. When Grace Leonard asked him how it felt to be a celebrity, he responded, “This Tillich they write about - it's not really me. I am

<sup>53</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 274.

<sup>54</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 275.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Coles, “In Paul Tillich's Seminar,” in *Harvard Diary: Reflections on the Sacred and the Secular* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 164.

two persons. And the one has nothing to do with the other." When she asked how he felt about the famous Paul Tillich, he replied, "Curious."<sup>56</sup> Among friends, he came to refer to this "other" Tillich as "Paul Tillich, the object." After the *Time* cover story about him appeared in 1959, he wrote a playful letter to the editor:

Dear Sir,

I have read your article on the castle builder and fence sitting theologian, Paul Tillich, and I must say that you did an excellent job about this man of whom I have a slight knowledge. It is astonishing how much material you brought in partly by direct, partly by indirect communication. I think your presentation of his system was as clear as it could be, and the personal sections as rich and warm as they could be. I heard that Mr. Tillich has received many congratulations about the article.

Now I must admit that Paul Tillich is the writer of this letter. He thanks you.

Paul Tillich<sup>57</sup>

Such gestures both implicitly acknowledged this cleft in his personality while also partly embracing the absurd situation it put him in.

Certainly whenever his own self-awareness failed, Tillich had friends who were ready to deflate his pretensions and to warn him of the dangers of co-optation. Pauck, whose report on Tillich's "willing mingling" with wealth and power and his "Narcissus-like" glances at himself were no doubt drawn from personal experience, was one such restraining voice. Another was Herbert Marcuse, a frequent conversational sparring partner of Tillich's during his Harvard days. Marcuse, who together with the rest of the Frankfurt School was highly conscious of capitalist societies' tendency to swallow their own critics, once complained to Tillich about a

<sup>56</sup> Cali, *Paul Tillich, First-hand*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 240.

comment he had made to a *New York Times* reporter after meeting with members of the Harvard Business School faculty. Tillich had said that he was “impressed by their tremendous spirituality and the efforts they made to overcome their problems.”

Marcuse was horrified: “Frankly, to me, the term ‘spirituality’ as applied to the business community has an obscene connotation. The ‘problems’ of the business community are the problems of an adequate rate of profit - everything else must be subordinated to it. To me, spirituality and profit don't jibe - bin ich zu chrislich? [am I too Christian?]

58 Tillich's speech at the *Time* gala in 1963, titled “The Ambiguity of Perfection,” was simultaneously an acknowledgement of his friends’ criticism and also a subtle reply to it. It was, in any case, a highly creative response to the predicament of his fame and an extraordinary display of self-awareness amid what was otherwise a trivial and self-congratulatory gathering of celebrities and socialites. After praising the achievements of the varied and famous guests, Tillich excoriated the “one-dimensional” culture of the United States, which was “determined by the drive toward expansion in the horizontal line: be it the push into outer space, be it the production of ever new and improved tools, be it the increase in means and materials of communication, be it the growing number of human beings to whom cultural ‘goods’ are available.” The profit-motive was a relentless driver of this one-dimensionality: “if cultural goods can be sold and bought it is an almost irresistible temptation for contemporary creative minds to produce in order to sell.” In such a

58 Herbert Marcuse to Paul Tillich, December 28, 1962, PTP, bMS 649/164.

culture, the “creative critic” had to constantly resist “against being taken into the culture as another cultural good.”<sup>59</sup>

These words, anticipating the “Great Refusal” Marcuse called for in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), were obviously intended by Tillich for himself.<sup>60</sup> He urged the guests to “stop running in the one-dimension. We must come to a rest; we must enter into creation and unite with its inner power” He also urged awareness of the inescapable ambiguity of all life, including life in the horizontal dimension. An awareness of one's own ambiguity was an essential mark of maturity. But: “Ambiguity does not mean evil. The merely negative critics of our condition confuse the two concepts and are not able to name the positive sources from which even their own criticism derives: if everything were negative it could not even be recognized as negative. Life is not like that – its problem is deeper. It is profoundly ambiguous.” Tillich paid his hosts a rather backhanded compliment when he noted that “the American irony, including the style of *Time*, shows some awareness of the ambiguity of life – as long as it does not degenerate into mere cynicism.” For even the shallow knowingness, consumerism, and relentless commodification of everything that could be found in American culture was not unrelated to an ultimate concern. The vertical dimension “is present in the secular as well as in the religious realm. It is present, too, in our own one-dimensional culture, though obscured and suppressed by the forces of the horizontal and their restless drives.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Tillich, “The Ambiguity of Perfection,” 69.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1964).

<sup>61</sup> Tillich, “The Ambiguity of Perfection,” 70.

### **Tillich's Encounter with the World Religions**

In their later years, Paulus and Hannah became world travelers – to Germany and Great Britain for recurring teaching engagements and guest lectureships, but also further afield: to Greece in 1956, to Japan in 1960, and to Egypt and Israel in 1963. In Egypt he saw the pyramids and was struck by the highly individualized expressions on the faces of mummified pharaohs: "One admired, but one also felt that this is no real victory over death." In Israel he visited a number of biblical sites, stayed on several kibbutzim, and reunited with his old friend Martin Buber for the final time; the trip gave him the opportunity to reflect on the "everlasting conversation" between Judaism and Christianity as well as the more immediate political problems posed by the creation of the state of Israel.<sup>62</sup> With the help of the mythologist Joseph Campbell, an enthusiast of Sanskrit and Hindu thought, Tillich planned a trip to India in 1962 that had to be cancelled.<sup>63</sup> Greece made a deep impression upon him. A visit to the Acropolis overwhelmed him with its beauty and convinced him beyond any doubt that the pagan gods were real creative forces, the symbols for which were perhaps dead but the reality of which was undeniable. The temple of Athena was a monument to a real power – that of wisdom – that he had known in his own life and experience. He wrote to Marion Hausner, his future biographer, that "Some revisions of my theology are now unavoidable. I should

<sup>62</sup> Paul Tillich, "Israel: Report About My Trip," 1963, PTP, bMS 649/63 (2).

<sup>63</sup> Joseph Campbell to Paul Tillich, February 1, 1961, PTP, bMS 649/128; Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 258.



write 'On the Reality of the Pagan gods.'" <sup>64</sup> He never did write this essay, but the central insight behind it provides a major thrust of his later thought.

But the most important trip, in terms of his later life and thought, was to Japan in the spring and summer of 1960. Tillich's ten-week visit, organized by the Committee for Intellectual Interchange, was tightly packed with lectures, talks, discussions, and sight-seeing, mostly in Tokyo and Kyoto. After some initial hesitation about the wisdom of embarking on such a journey at his advanced age, Tillich threw himself with characteristic energy into a dynamic and openhanded engagement with his hosts, similar to his behavior upon arriving in America. Tokyo at the time of Tillich's visit was in the midst of turbulent demonstrations by students and workers against the newly revised security pact between Japan and the United States. Tillich was sympathetic toward the protests and dismissive of charges by American officials that they were the product of anti-American or communist propaganda; the overwhelmingly positive reaction to his own lectures – one of which was so crowded that umbrella-wielding students stood outside the windows of the lecture hall, listening in the rain – convinced him the target of the student-demonstrators was not in fact the United States itself but rather conservative Japanese elites attempting to use the American alliance to repeal the democratic and pacifist elements of Japan's postwar constitution. Japanese society as a whole struck Tillich as poised uncertainly between feudalistic traditions and westernization; in the face of the "spirit of industrial society and the democratization of life as such, the feudal remnants disappear, often under painful

<sup>64</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 258.

personal conflicts." This dilemma was especially acute for the younger generation, "which has lost the traditional norms of living and has not received new ones. This produces a vacuum into which questionable or dangerous forces may enter." Tillich attributed his own popularity among his audiences to the sense of existential disorientation, the felt lack of an "ultimate concern."<sup>65</sup>

The primary motivations behind his visit were intellectual and religious. Tillich's meetings with Japan's Christian leaders, some of whom he had known since his New York days, were disappointing; he later criticized Japanese Christianity for simply importing western denominational forms and creating walled-off westernized enclaves without much effort to find authentic points of connection or communication with the surrounding Japanese culture. Far more stimulating to him were his dealings with representatives of Buddhism, in both Zen and Amidist forms, and, to a lesser extent, of Shinto and various Japanese "New Religions." One of the most characteristic and appealing aspects of Tillich engagement with eastern religion, indeed, was his disaggregation of different religious perspectives, and his seeking out of parallels to longstanding Christian theological arguments. The Zen emphasis on achieving Enlightenment through personal self-discipline, for example, stood opposed to the the Amidist injunction to surrender to the compassion of the Buddha power; this was similar to the perennial Western debate of "Pelagians" versus "Augustinians" over the individual's ability to will his own salvation. He took

<sup>65</sup> Paul Tillich, "Informal Report on Lecture Trip to Japan," August 1960, PTP, bMS 649/63 (1). For a exhaustive, not to say exhausting, account of Tillich's travels in Japan, see Tomoaki Fukai, *Paul Tillich – Journey to Japan in 1960* (De Gruyter, 2013). See also, Terry Thomas, *Paul Tillich and World Religions* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1999).

part in tea ceremonies, visits to shrines and temples, and extended theological conversations, usually mediated through an interpreter, with priests, monks, abbots, and scholars. In Kamakura, he visited with D.T. Suzuki.<sup>66</sup>

Tillich also reconnected with the Zen master Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, an old friend whom he had once debated on a stage at Harvard, in the latter's rock garden in Kyoto. As Tillich described their meeting in Kyoto:

The garden, not larger than a large oblong courtyard, is surrounded by a wall with astonishing colors, produced by nature in about five hundred years. The floor is gravel, raked in an oceanic pattern, but most important are the about fifteen rocks, ordered in groups of two or three or more in perfect proportions of distance, height and breath. Soon the chief-priest of the temple, Mr. Hisamatsu and I fell into a discussion of more than an hour about the question of whether the rock garden and the universe are identical (the position of the Buddhists) or non-identical but united by participation (my position). No amount of reading can replace such an experience.

This theme – what Tillich later called “the contrast between the principle of identity and the principle of participation” – recurred again and again throughout Tillich's conversations with Buddhist interlocutors. In another conversation with an Amidist Buddhist scholar, the question of communion between persons arose. The scholar said to Tillich, “If the individual self is a 'substance' (in the sense of 'standing upon itself'), no community is possible.” To which Tillich replied that “only on this basis is community -- in contrast to realizing identity – possible.” This comment marked the end of the conversation, when each party realized the vast gulf which separated them and agreed that further dialogue on this point was fruitless. Tillich later observed that although the principles of identity and participation were exclusive, “the actual life of both Christianity, especially in its Protestant form, and Buddhism,

<sup>66</sup> Tillich, “Informal Report on Lecture Trip to Japan.”

especially in its monastic form, could receive elements from each other without losing their basic character."<sup>67</sup>

Traditional Japanese architecture, painting, and design impressed Tillich for its "ability to reduce things to their 'essentials.'" He acknowledged that the so-called "principle of identity" gave Asiatic cultures a greater appreciation for nature, which was seamlessly integrated into many of the human structures and landscapes he encountered. The one-story wooden houses in which he and Hannah stayed – with their spare furnishings, movable walls, and orientation towards outdoor courtyards or gardens – gave him the refreshing sense of living in a tent. The Buddhist and Shinto temples he visited meanwhile radiated a "holiness" that was immediately accessible to his own religious sense. Of the large Buddha statue at Kamakura, Tillich wrote, "I felt I would now live for two months in his shadow." The various Buddhas and Bodisatva statues "are not representing a god or gods, but they represent the Buddha-power, the Spirit of awakening and opening the eyes of the mind for truth about oneself and one's world and about that which is above both of them and which is present in the Buddha Spirit." Overall, the trip and his experiences left Tillich deeply humbled and grateful. In a circular letter to his friends written at the end of the journey, he admitted a sense of slight bewilderment but also excitement: "I cannot formulate what it has meant before all the impressions have settled down in me; and even then probably others will notice the influence of Japan more than I myself. But I know that something has happened: No

<sup>67</sup> Tillich, "Informal Report on Lecture Trip to Japan."

Western provincialism of which I am aware will be tolerated by me from now on in my thought and work.”<sup>68</sup>

In defense of Tillich against his own self-criticism, he had been trying to battle against western provincialism in his own thought for some time. The comparative study of world religions – the so-called “History of Religions” school, dating back at least to Friedrich Schleiermacher – was a small but significant element of liberal theological training in both Germany and America; it was certainly very active in Germany during the years when Tillich studied under the influence of Ernest Troeltsch and then worked alongside Rudolph Otto at the University of Marburg.<sup>69</sup> Tillich in fact wrote one of his doctoral dissertations on the role of the History of Religions in Schelling’s early thought.<sup>70</sup> Buddhism, meanwhile, had been making serious inroads in the bohemian, artistic, and intellectual circles where Tillich moved in America at least since the World Parliament of Religions in 1893.<sup>71</sup> D. T. Suzuki, a friend of Tillich’s from his New York days, developed a large following with erudite books like *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934), *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959), and *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960).<sup>72</sup> Historians of Buddhism and other eastern religions in America have not been sufficiently attentive to their association, from the 1930s on, with psychoanalysis, especially in

<sup>68</sup> Tillich, “Informal Report on Lecture Trip to Japan.”

<sup>69</sup> For Tillich’s exposure to the History of Religions school, see Eliade, “Paul Tillich and the History of Religions,” . For a hostile treatment of the tradition of academic scholarship on World Religions, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling’s Positive Philosophy: Its Presuppositions and Principles* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, [1910] 1974).

<sup>71</sup> For a brisk, informative account of Buddhism’s inroads into American culture, see Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

<sup>72</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1994); D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); and

its humanistic, neo-Freudian, and otherwise non-orthodox iterations. Erich Fromm and Karen Horney were both deeply interested in Zen; Horney took up a serious discipline of meditation in the years before she died while Fromm co-authored *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* with Suzuki as a result of a conference in Cuernavaca, Mexico in which they had both participated.<sup>73</sup> Carl Jung wrote the preface to Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*; institutions like the Bollingen Foundation and the Eranos Conference encouraged a blend of depth psychology, comparative religion, mythology, folklore, and social anthropology that was geared to a pluralistic reckoning between East and West.<sup>74</sup>

The problem of foreign religions, then, was not altogether foreign to Tillich. Even so, his trip to Japan seems to have marked a departure in his thought; in his later years, even as he was finishing work on volume 3 of the *Systematic Theology* (1963), Tillich frequently expressed the sad wish that he had enough time left to reconstruct his entire system from the ground up to mitigate its western provincialism.<sup>75</sup> One year after his return, he gave the Bampton Lectures at Columbia University, published as *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (1961). This slender, incisive volume shows the deep imprint made by his Japanese experience: both his direct engagement with Buddhists – one of the book's chapters relates “A Christian-Buddhist Conversation” – but also his thoughts on the

<sup>73</sup> Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki, and Richard DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (

<sup>74</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, forward by C.G. Jung (New York: Grove Press, [1934] 1994). On the Bollingen series, see William McGuire, *Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). On Eranos, see Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 513.

secularization and westernization afoot in Japanese society. The book's eponymous "encounter" refers not only to that between the different "world religions" proper, but also to the encounter between these religions and the secular "quasi-religions" of nationalism, communism, and liberal humanism. It was the interaction he had witnessed in Japan between traditional Japanese religious and aristocratic culture and the "religious underground" present in western technical civilization that provided the model for this "In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence."<sup>76</sup>

In 1962, Tillich retired from Harvard and took the Nuveen Professorship of Theology at the University of Chicago, where he taught several joint seminars with Mircea Eliade on the history and future of religions. For Eliade, the uniqueness and joy of the seminar consisted in "following Tillich's mind as it confronted the unfamiliar, archaic or oriental, religious fact—a cosmogonic myth, an initiation ritual, an eccentric divine figure, a strange but religious form of behavior, and so on. He was always able to grasp not only the religious meaning of such a fact, but also its human value. For him it revealed a specific – even if in some cases a rather aberrant—encounter with the sacred."<sup>77</sup> This vision of inter-religious convergence – or at least communicability – was extremely appealing to other ecumenical

<sup>76</sup> Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 97.

<sup>77</sup> Mircea Eliade, "Paul Tillich and the History of Religions," in *The Future of Religions*, 33.

Protestant theologians and church leaders during the early 1960s. Tillich's attempts to de-provincialize his own thought coincided with, and perhaps even slightly lagged behind, a more general embrace of comparative and pluralist approaches in top seminaries and divinity schools that sometimes seemed to dissolve Protestant theology into the study of world religions. (A trend which has continued apace.) In 1957, Harvard Divinity School established the Center for the Study of World Religions; Tillich opposed the move at the time, although once the Center was established he came to support the center and the activities its first director, Robert Slater.<sup>78</sup>

In 1962, just as Tillich was leaving Harvard for the University of Chicago, the Canadian professor of comparative religions Wilfred Cantwell Smith was appointed as the new director at CSWR. Smith wrote to Tillich upon his appointment and quoted back to him a sentence from near the end of *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*: "In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence." Smith commented that his own, recently published book *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1960) was "an amplification of that sentence."<sup>79</sup> Cantwell failed to quote the two sentences that preceded it, which clarified and qualified what Tillich was

<sup>78</sup> Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 513; Paul Tillich and Robert Slater correspondence, PTP, bMS 649/186.

<sup>79</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith to Paul Tillich, August 26, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/186. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).



arguing. The way for Christianity to break through its own particularity, Tillich wrote, "is not to relinquish one's religious tradition for the sake of a universal concept which would be nothing but a concept. The way is to penetrate into the depth of one's own religion, in devotion, thought and action."<sup>80</sup>

Tillich's reservations about the new vogue for world religions came through in an exchange he had with Juliet Hollister, the Manhattan housewife and friend of Eleanor Roosevelt who in 1960 founded the Temple of Understanding, an interfaith organization billing itself as a "spiritual UN" and claiming the support of international luminaries such as Albert Schweitzer, U Thant, Pope John XXIII, and the Dalai Llama. The idea was to convene representatives of the major religious traditions of the world in order to foster common understanding, to perceive the essential unity of all religions, and to forestall global nuclear calamity. Hollister had attempted to recruit Tillich as Christianity's "representative" to the Temple of Understanding. In a polite but critical letter, Tillich wrote that although he "value[d] highly the attitude out of which your project comes," he could not support it. "The Christian message," in contrast to the Christian churches, could not be coordinated, for it "cuts through all religions, including Christianity, and this cannot be coordinated – just because it judges Christianity as much, and sometimes even more than the other religions." The "spiritual UN" approach, moreover, denied "the dynamic element in the understanding of religion":

The six "religions" which you put alongside each other in the temple of understanding belong to quite different dimensions. For instance, Confucianism is a system of ethical and political rules with a vague religious background. Buddhism tries in its higher forms a definite attempt to

<sup>80</sup> Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, 97.

transcend all religions. Hinduism has universal validity only in its philosophical and poetic self-expression, not in its concrete religious existence.

The Temple of Understanding's "mere beside-each-otherness," Tillich thought, concealed the real religious problems of the time by excluding the possibility of mutual critique and interpenetration in the encounter of the world religions – and also by denying the much more historically significant encounter between all of the religions proper and the "secular quasi-religions—nationalism, communism, and western liberal humanism."<sup>81</sup>

The "problem of pluralism" played itself out in other ways as well. As Vatican II picked up steam throughout the last several years of Tillich's life (he died a few months before its completion), Protestant-Catholic dialogue came to assume almost as much importance to him as his exchanges with the Japanese Buddhists. Tillich participated in numerous panels and conversations with Catholic clerics, became good friends with the Jesuit theologian Fr. Gustave Weigel, and wrote a moving eulogy for Pope John XXIII upon his death in 1963, praising the Pope for making "the first serious step from the side of the Roman Catholic church to overcome the split which has separated the two largest Christian groups for centuries and has narrowed down both of them, depriving the Catholic church of the freedom and creativity it had in the middle ages."<sup>82</sup> Later that year, over Christmas, Tillich traveled to Rome and met with Cardinal Augustin Bea, confessor to Pope Pius XII and the primary author of *Nostra aetate*, the council's "Declaration on the

<sup>81</sup> Paul Tillich to Judith Hollister, November 28, 1960, January 29, 1962, PTP, bMS 649/153.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Tillich, "Funeral Address at Pope John XXIII's Death," PTP, bMS 649/61 (11).

Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." As in his conversations with Buddhists, Tillich did not attempt to paper over his differences with Catholics; he responded to the mood of ecumenical convergence without adopting its most unrealistic expectations. When asked by a radio interviewer in 1964 whether a significant union between the Protestant and Catholic churches was at hand, he emphatically responded, "No, I do not believe there will be." He added, however, that the reforms of Vatican II in fact signaled "something, perhaps, much more important," namely "the end of the counter-reformation ... a period of history in which the attitudes of both groups, Protestants and Catholics, were only determined by their mutual negation, by saying 'NO' to each other."<sup>83</sup> In the wake of Vatican II, interconfessional dialogue and exchange was again possible.

Shortly before he published volume 3 of his *Systematic Theology* in 1963, Tillich read *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955, translated into English in 1959) by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the paleontologist, geologist, and Jesuit priest whose writings had been censored by the Church hierarchy during his own lifetime and who later found a large and diverse posthumous following among Catholic liberals, the New Age, and many corners of liberal Protestantism.<sup>84</sup> Tillich was so struck by the similarities between Teilhard's book and the one he was about to publish that he feared "everybody will think that it is all taken from Teilhard!" This was especially true of part IV of the *Systematic Theology*, on "Life and the Spirit," in which which

<sup>83</sup> "A tape recorded interview with Dr. Paul Tillich conducted by Don Campbell, member of the WRFD staff, January 29, 1964, and broadcast over WRFD February 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>," [transcript], PTP, bMS 649/84.

<sup>84</sup> See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Perennials, 1976). For a critical take on Teilhard's influence over New Age spirituality, see David H. Lane, *The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet for a New Age* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

Tillich elaborated a philosophy of nature, criticized the Platonic dualism of body and mind, and developed a concept of Spirit that was inclusive of bodily, physical realities. Teilhard's idea of the future – the so-called "Omega Point" towards which all consciousness was supposedly evolving – was less satisfying to him; he found the idea "too utopian."<sup>85</sup>

### **Intimations of a Religious Counterculture**

Teilhard's eclectic following points to another aspect of religious life in sixties to which Tillich was connected; his late-career interests overlapped with and bumped up against some of the more exotic and eclectic trends in late 1950s and early 1960s religious life that came to full flower after his death in the late-60s counterculture. Even when they were not in overt rebellion against the hegemonic religious ethos – as, sexually or sartorially – such movements often constituted a kind of spiritual counterculture that was a far cry from the images of grey-flanneled suburban conformity and institutionalized cheeriness that one usually associates with the religious life of the postwar era. What Robert Ellwood has dubbed the "underground" element of the early-1960s religious scene – antecedents of the "rebel yells and psychedelic hues" of the late sixties – included evangelical revivals on college campuses, UFO cults, the Beat movement and its growing following, the rapid growth of Eastern religions, and an notable upsurge in monastic vow-taking.<sup>86</sup> "Magic" was in the air. Ellwood, the most thorough chronicler of the midcentury

<sup>85</sup> [I know this exists, but I can't find it!]

<sup>86</sup> Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, 40. See also Robert Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

religious scene, remembers his years as an undergraduate at the University of Colorado in Boulder, when he and his friends belonged to a circle of Anglo-Catholics, the social significance of which he describes eloquently:

Although this Fifties Anglo-Catholicism was ensconced within the ultraestablishment Episcopal church ... in some ways it was for us, as it had been much earlier for certain aesthetes of the Mauve Decade, the 1890s, a kind of inner spiritual counterculture. Like the hippies to come we rejected a humdrum world by creating around ourselves an infinitely more colorful and exciting alternative reality. By dint of the Middle America-defying vestures and gestures of our medieval European rites we experienced expansion of consciousness across great gulfs of space and time, liberating ourselves at soul level from the one-dimensionality of the present. Like members of the League in Hermann Hesse's paradigmatic *Journey to the East* we were in the world yet not entirely of it as we wandered from festival to festival and from century to century and did not pass a church (of our persuasion) without entering its dim cool interior to whisper a prayer amid the saints and sanctuary lights.<sup>87</sup>

Tillich's Christian existentialism, as we have seen, provided a similar respectable cover for an enchanted "inner world" that was not as devoid of political consequence as its critics charge.

Traces of this diverse "religious underground" can be seen peeking through Tillich's ample correspondence with his readers and fans. Especially after his much-touted 1959 piece in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Tillich seemed to bring people with occult or esoteric beliefs out of the woodwork. It was deep speaking to deep – except that the deeps were apparently home to some unusual inhabitants. Adherents of all manner of spiritual sects – Christian Scientists, theosophists, spiritualists, Anthroposophists, transcendental "mentalists" – sought him out for collaboration or confirmation of their views, as did those claiming their own special

<sup>87</sup> Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, 41.

revelations. One Mrs. Eve Brightwell Anderson from San Francisco – a self-described “genealogist” and “family historian” – wrote Tillich to commend him for “your forthright courage, as well as your supreme scholarship and great wisdom” but also to impart upon him what she referred to as “Everywoman's Secret”: the “ancient answer to life's basic mystery,” an answer “not expressible in words” that “has been termed occult and too dreadful for man generally to receive.” Namely:

Nothingness is the ultimate end of all life.

This means no things, no objects -- that eventually there will be an end to all living, all existence.

That what we call empty space is the only permanent reality, that the eternal is peaceful, deep sleep; it is also self-sacrificing love.

That the beginning of our universe started with a discontent, an irritation, an urge or revolt against nothingness, against darkness, against stillness, against emptiness.

That our universe came into existence as a result of this revolt, this urge to do something, to be something, -- the need for self-realization. This urge has been called the external necessity. It is the life force -- is positive and is termed the masculine factor.

The nameless, formless, eternal depth has been called the inner peace that is beyond understanding. It is selfless love -- is negative and is termed the feminine factor.

Mrs. Anderson offered that she “would be deeply happy to go into some of the implications, ramifications, and practical applications of this idea if you wish” and added that the terrible secret lay “buried so deep within the subconscious of women that most of them have little realization of it, especially today.”<sup>88</sup> More generally, Tillich's mail from readers reflected a sense of personal connection to him as well as

<sup>88</sup> Mrs. E. Brightwell Anderson to Paul Tillich, July 15, 1958, PTP, bMS 649/120.

gratitude that his words had punctured their social isolation – mirroring thoughts or questions not generally acknowledged by their peers but that had nagged at them their whole lives.<sup>89</sup>

A number of these letters crossed the line – not always sharp – between religious eccentricity and mental illness. Tillich's secretary Grace Leonard referred to these missives as “Crackpot Letters,” often recognizable by their liberal underlining, capitalization, exclamation points, and red typewriter ink as well as their tone of urgency, paranoia, and grandiosity. Tillich was so fascinated by these letters that he offered a stack of them to a colleague in the Psychology Department at Harvard for study.<sup>90</sup> One inmate at Southern Illinois Penitentiary in Menard, Illinois wrote to Tillich informing him of a “‘Diary’ of ‘Supreme Revelations’”: “Have very important ‘messages’ to give to you, place in your hands and other people of our God. If at all humanly possible come to Menard to interview me in person, or if you are unable to come yourself, send some trusted person, you, yourself know, of Chicago Divinity School.”<sup>91</sup> A “shut-in” from Los Angeles wrote Tillich to relate his remarkable life story (which included stints as a preacher, salesman, hotel manager, WWI army officer, newspaper reporter, steamship agent, independent oil operator, rancher, and entrepreneur of healing mineral waters) as well as his wanderings through numerology, spiritualism, and Hinduism; his letter attempted to entrust Tillich with insights into scripture gleaned from a revelatory experience he had undergone after a serious car accident and illness: “Without doubt, this is an S.O.S.-

<sup>89</sup> See Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 177-179.

<sup>90</sup> Grace Cali, *Paul Tillich First-hand*, 60.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Marion Adams to Paul Tillich, August 6, 1965, PTP, bMS 649/116.

The S.O.S. is for SOMEONE (Science and or Religion)-Take over-lock stock and barrel.My physical cannot endure. I MUST,and at once GIVE-by 'Last Will and Testament'--My notes, memos, recordings-my writings. THESE must go into PROPER Directional Management. I alone can Direct this 'SOUL-Project.'" This man's ambition, in which he apparently saw Tillich as a potential ally, was to effect a "wedding" of religion and science: "In 1958-59 we are entering THE ADVENT of THE ATOM. this, RAPIDLY, is taking US into outer space. NEVER has THE FIELD OF SCIENCE HAD SUCH GLORIOUS OPPORTUNITIES."<sup>92</sup>

Beyond evidence of a mental health crisis in postwar American society, it is difficult to know what to make of such letters; they are no doubt markers of a chiliastic or futuristic strain that runs as a constant in American religion from Revolutionary-era premillennialism to the New Age. But they also reflect characteristic anxieties of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Many of them make reference to atomic warfare, space travel, Church-State controversies, or Vatican II. Some of them have the feel of science fiction.<sup>93</sup> "Even as phenomena pointed to the existence of Pluto," wrote one correspondent, "so do the noumena point to the eventual understanding of the length and breadth and depth and height."<sup>94</sup> One self-styled "INDEPENDENT AVERAGE WOMAN" declared it her goal "to reach the Central Intelligence Intellect of Knowing Men, Women, and Children and all other Masses that make up the face of the earth who understand nomological and logical

<sup>92</sup> Stanton T. Abbey to Paul Tillich, March 17, 1959, PTP, bMS 649/116.

<sup>93</sup> For insights into this negotiation between postwar religious piety and "Space Age" scientific futurism, see James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Robert Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace*; and Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 23-39.

<sup>94</sup> Clarence Eddy to Paul Tillich, March 15, 1959, PTP, bMS 649/138.



reasoning both with regard to Church and State, or any Juggernaut for that matter.”<sup>95</sup>

Although he rarely responded to them, it is possible that these letters were of more than idle interest to Tillich and influenced his perception of the religious significance of the Space Age. In a 1964 essay on “The Effects of Space Exploration on Man’s Condition and Stature,” Tillich provided an analysis of the psychological and spiritual reactions to the breaking of the Earth’s gravitational field that also functioned as an astute and plausible explanation for these kind of *outré* imaginings. “The image of man who looks down at the earth, not from heaven, but from a cosmic sphere above the earth,” he wrote, had “unlocked streams of imagination about encounters inside and outside the gravitational field of the earth with non-earthly, though not heavenly (or hellish) beings.” The cognitive expansion into space had also produced an increase in anxiety: “The dizziness felt by people at Pascal’s time facing the empty spaces between the stars has been increased in a period in which man has pushed not only cognitively but also bodily into these spaces.”<sup>96</sup> The sense that pervades many of these letters is that of a tremulous and somewhat crazed anticipation of convergence between different traditions and spheres: science and religion, earth and space, Protestant and Catholic, East and West.

Although he resisted it, Tillich himself was not altogether immune to this sense. His own journey to the East – spiritual, intellectual, and literal – was accompanied by more frequent contacts with friends and colleagues on the West

<sup>95</sup> Genevieve Kalisiewicz to Paul Tillich, March 16, 1959, PTP, bMS 649/157.

<sup>96</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Effects of Space Exploration on Man’s Condition and Stature,” in *The Future of Religions*, 43-44.

Coast: part of a broader "Californication" of the era's highbrow religious and artistic scene. From 1962 until his death in 1965, Tillich taught one semester every academic year at the University of Santa Barbara, giving him the chance to reunite with various old German colleagues, like Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, who had decamped from New York to California.<sup>97</sup> Before he received the offer of the Neuveen professorship at Chicago, Tillich anticipated that Santa Barbara would be his final academic home before retirement to East Hampton. Beginning in the late 1950s, he revived an old friendship with his former student Frederic Spiegelberg, the professor of Asian religions at Stanford University who together with Aldous Huxley was one of the major inspirations for the founding of the Esalen Institute at Big Sur and the resulting Human Potential movement.<sup>98</sup> Tillich gave a talk at Esalen in 1964 on the possibilities of theological dialogue between East and West. The Anglican priest turned 60s guru Alan Watts, who had proposed a synthesis between Zen Buddhism and Christianity in *Behold the Spirit* (1949), visited Tillich at Harvard in 1961; they had a long conversation about Buddhism after which Tillich gave Watts a copy of his book *Love, Power, and Justice*. Later, Watts invited Tillich to contribute informal talks to Watts's celebrated Bay Area radio program on KPFA, a Pacifica Radio station out of Berkeley; Tillich declined due to already excessive demands on his time and energy.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Tillich's seminars with D. Mackenzie Brown and conversations with students at the University of Santa Barbara in 1963 are recorded in Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*.

<sup>98</sup> On Esalen, see Jeffrey Kirpal, *Esalen: The Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>99</sup> Alan Watts to Paul Tillich, January 1, 1961, and Paul Tillich to Alan Watts, n.d., folder marked "Pacifica," PTP, bMS 649/173. See Alan Watts, *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 1947). Tillich also was close friends with the Episcopal Bishop of California, James Pike.

Tillich never denied a mystical element in his own thought, and often defended “mysticism” against charges of mushiness or vagueness. There was, he pointed out, a mystical element in all religion and in all philosophy, a silent point of contact with the unknowable and unknown.<sup>100</sup> The closing image of *The Courage to Be* – “the God above the God of theism” – suggested a strong mystical dimension in Tillich’s concept of God, although Tillich was also careful to caution that mysticism needed to be balanced by rational critique and by the prophetic, person-to-person experience of God. Several of the so-called “Christian atheists” theologians proclaiming that “God is Dead” cited Tillich for authority. The “God above God” was one of the most commonly cited appeals in the many appreciative letters Tillich received from his readers. “I have read *The Courage to Be*,” as one wrote, “and I want you to know how much the God above the God of theism concept has liberated me from much of the conflict which rages within me between historical Christian dogma and the depth of my own existence.”<sup>101</sup> In other quarters, the response to the idea was bewilderment rather than liberation. Another of Tillich’s correspondents related a funny story about a talk given by the Viennese psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl in 1964 on the campus of Goucher College in Baltimore. The last of the written questions submitted after Frankl’s lecture was, “what does Paul Tillich mean when he refers to ‘The God above God.’” Frankl paused enigmatically, smiled, and said, “If I undertook to answer this question, I might be called ‘the Tillich above Tillich.’” The room erupted with laughter and the session ended.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> See the description of the mystical experience in *The Courage to Be*, 144-7.

<sup>101</sup> Jo Carole MacKay to Paul Tillich, February 24, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/163.

<sup>102</sup> Newton Aiken to Paul Tillich, February 19, 1964, PTP, bMS 649/116.

The mystical undercurrent of religious culture in the early 1960s was of course also related to the dawning interest – at first scientific, then countercultural – in psychedelic drugs. Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and Watts's *The Joyous Cosmology* (1962) were signs of the times.<sup>103</sup> Tillich's later years at Harvard were simultaneous with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert's experiments in the Psychology Department with psilocybin mushrooms (and later LSD), which ultimately led to their being fired from the university and becoming spiritual gurus in the youth counterculture. Well before any of this happened, the two psychology professors approached Tillich as he was having breakfast at a Cambridge hotel to explain to him that “they had synthesized the mystical experience.” The celebrated “Marsh Chapel experiment” in 1962, in which psilocybin and placebos were separately administered to two groups of divinity school students attending a Good Friday chapel service on Boston University's campus, purported to show that psychedelic drugs reliably generated religious experiences; several of Tillich's students and colleagues were involved in the experiment.<sup>104</sup> One of these, his teaching assistant Paul Lee, later became a professor of philosophy at UC Santa Cruz and the editor of the *Psychedelic Review*. Tillich was ambivalent about these consciousness-experiments; he once asked Lee sharply whether “the whole context of the medieval town where his father was minister and all the formative forces that shaped his religious life could be condensed in a small tab of minute dosage.” Lee

<sup>103</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), and Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: Pantheon, 1962).

<sup>104</sup> Walter N. Pahnke, “Drugs and Mysticism,” *The International Journal of Parapsychology* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1966): 295-313.

found the question rhetorical, but conceded that it was doubtful.<sup>105</sup> Several years later, after Lee had become more immersed in the drug and countercultural scene at Santa Cruz, Hannah asked him for advice on taking LSD, which she and Paulus were curious to try with Mircea Eliade and his wife in Chicago. Lee gave the advice but never found out what happened with the plan. He may have died before he had the chance to try it.<sup>106</sup>

At the time of Tillich's death in 1965, he was engaged in a complex, dialectical give-and-take with a variety of different religious and spiritual trends that would explode in the second half of the decade in the sixties counterculture. It is interesting to speculate what he would have made some of the various phenomena from the late sixties "religious situation": from liberation and feminist theologies (on which his own thought was influential) to what Theodore Rozack called the "counterfeit infinity" of psychedelic drug culture to the vogue for India and other eastern traditions to Transcendental Meditation and the Human Potential Movement. He was, in a sense, on the cusp of all of these things, a borderline "guru" himself. And yet the very proliferation of these different trends is in some sense more important than any one of them in particular. As part of the "postmodernization" of American religion, religious practice was splintering and

<sup>105</sup> Lee, "Paul Tillich: A Reminiscence and Homage."

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Paul Lee, August 10, 2016. For a sharp but sympathetic critique of the drug culture's religious aspirations, see Theodore Rozack, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 155-77. For a more positive view, see Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Ethnogenic Plants and Chemicals* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2003). See also Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1998) and Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shalin, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

continuing its process of commodification, trending toward what Eugene McCarragher has called a “commodity spirituality,” a “mix-and-match collage of beliefs appropriated from various sources that is the signature religious consciousness of consumer society, the contemplative mysticism of commodity culture.”<sup>107</sup>

Tillich had been correct to note the danger, as he put it in his address to the *Time* banquet, of “being taken into the culture as another cultural good”; he was also correct when he predicted that he would be largely forgotten within a generation. Part of his eclipse as a thinker can be attributed to the special circumstances around his wife’s memoir and the details that posthumously emerged about his sex life. Part of it can be lain at the feet of the more general decline of a large upper-middle class reading public that supported his fame in the first place. Part of it can be attributed to the decline of mainline Protestantism as a quasi-hegemonic cultural influence. But some of it was due to the more general cycles of publicity and intellectual fashion, which spit Tillich out as quickly as they had taken him up. As Robert Coles pointed out, Tillich evinced a sly awareness of his own status in American culture:

He understood well the transient nature of critical acclaim for those like himself and, alas, the false nature of the embrace in the first place: ah, let’s try an émigré German theologian for a change—one whose interests in ‘art’ and ‘psychology’ remind us of our own, and one whose religious convictions are ‘intellectual’ and ‘philosophical,’ hence not likely to make anyone in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century American upper intelligentsia too nervous.<sup>108</sup>

Tillich was aware that this was his role, which was more powerful than he was. But he played the role in any case, gambling that he could leverage it to good effect. In

<sup>107</sup> McCarragher, *Christian Critics*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Coles, *Harvard Diary*, 164.

this respect, as in so many others, he was an ambiguous presence on the American scene.

**CODA, THE END OF THE INWARD MOMENT:  
PHILIP RIEFF, SUSAN SONTAG, AND PAUL TILlich**

1966, the year after Tillich's death, saw the publication of two books – Philip Rieff's *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* and Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* – that, in their divergent lines of argument, symbolized a political, moral, aesthetic, and sexual rift that would become a persistent feature of American intellectual culture in the coming decades and that marked the end of what can be recognized as an “inward moment” for the American intellectual elite. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* was a mordant attack on the characteristic maneuvers of what Rieff had dubbed, in his earlier book on Freud, “psychological man”: eschewing the interdictory authority of the past, chasing new and increasingly empty forms of instinctual gratification and self-expression, constantly managing and manipulating the emotional lives of others and of himself. Without the interdictory “no” provided by traditional religion, Rieff argued, culture was bound to hollow itself out and to degenerate into orgies – literal and figurative – of narcissism and violence. Although he held Freud partly responsible for unleashing this “barbarian” destruction of culture, Rieff also plainly admired and emulated Freud's “analytic attitude,” his ironic detachment, his genius for suspicion (including self-suspicion), and his stoical refusal to resurrect religious “therapies of commitment” in the fashion of his less



steadfast disciples such as Carl Jung or D.H. Lawrence (or Tillich, for that matter); the subtitle of the book was *Uses of Faith after Freud*.<sup>1</sup>

*Against Interpretation*, meanwhile, was a collection of some of Sontag's best-known essays from the early 1960s – including “Notes on ‘Camp’” and “On Style” – that chronicled her varied enthusiasms for French New Wave cinema, post-structuralist theory, pop art, theatre of the absurd, and other expressions of what she called the “new sensibility.” The essays were erudite and self-assured, in the style of the best of *Partisan Review*, but pointedly devoid of that journal's occasional fussiness and pedantry. In theory as well as practice, Sontag argued for an easing of the distinctions between high and low, elite and popular art. The title essay, “Against Interpretation” argued for a form of criticism capable of appreciating and engaging the sensuous surfaces of a work of art rather than pressing after deeper, often sententious, “meanings.” Modern interpretation, Sontag argued, had become “the intellect's revenge upon art.” The famous closing line of the essay was, “In place of a hermeneutics, we need an erotics of art.”<sup>2</sup> The book launched Sontag into literary and intellectual celebrity, as well as notoriety among the old-guard literary elite.

The contrast between these two books was all the more dramatic because the two authors had been married, unhappily, during the 1950s and were divorced, turbulently, in 1958. Their marriage was something of a scandal from the beginning, in part because Sontag was only seventeen at the time it began. Rieff, ten years Sontag's senior, had been her sociology professor at the University of Chicago; they

<sup>1</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” in *Against Interpretation*, 23.

married after an extremely brief courtship that began on the first day of one of his lecture courses. In 1952, they had a son, David Rieff, who later became an editor and writer in his own right. Of her husband, Sontag later remembered, "He was passionate, he was bookish, he was pure. He was very, very unworldly. *I was worldly, compared to him.*" The overall atmosphere of the marriage was extremely claustrophobic, however: "We were together twenty-four hours a day, practically," Sontag remembered. "He waited for me outside my classes. He wanted me to come to his classes. He followed me to the bathroom. I followed him to the bathroom."<sup>3</sup>

Tillich, it turns out, was friends and mentors to both halves of the couple during the mid-1950s, when all three were living in the Boston area. Tillich had recently begun his University Professorship at Harvard, Rieff was teaching at Brandeis, and Sontag was a graduate student, first at the University of Connecticut (in English) and then at Harvard (in Philosophy). Rieff, who had been avidly reading and admiring Tillich's writings since his undergraduate days at the University of Chicago and was good friends with Tillich's translator and theological interpreter James Luther Adams, invited Tillich for several lecturing and teaching engagements at Brandeis; for a time the two men also collaborated with Tillich's friends Kurt Goldstein and Ruth Nanda Ashen to draft a proposal for an interdisciplinary "Institute for the Study of Man." (The idea never went anywhere.)<sup>4</sup> Sontag, meanwhile, sought out Tillich's mentorship at Harvard; he once offered her some

<sup>3</sup> Joan Acocella, "The Hunger Artist: Is There Anything Susan Sontag Doesn't Want to Know," *The New Yorker* (February 27, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, "Suggested Statement About the Foundation of an Institute for the Study of Man," PTP, bMS 649/62 (2).

“much cherished praise” for a paper she did on Hegel for one of his classes and he wrote her a recommendation that helped her to secure a fellowship at Oxford.<sup>5</sup>

At some point, the connection between the elderly theologian and the young couple became closer and more social. According to Sontag, the couple socialized almost exclusively with older friends at the time, most of them émigré intellectuals.<sup>6</sup> Tillich and Hannah, of course, were the Cambridge émigré intellectuals par excellence, unique perhaps only in not being Jewish. A social circle formed that included the Rieffs, the Tillichs, the sociologist of religion Jacob Taubes, Taubes’s wife Susan, the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse (who lived with the Rieffs for a year while he was writing *Eros and Civilization*), and Marcuse’s wife Inge, the widow of Franz Neumann. In 1956, Rieff reported to James Luther Adams that “Tillichs-Marcuses-Rieff are an established local social combination” and expressed his hope that Adams would soon be able to join their regular Wednesday night soirees. Rieff added that he found Tillich to be “one of the most conversable men I have ever met.” Hannah, meanwhile, was “a delight.”<sup>7</sup>

All throughout this period, meanwhile, the marriage was deteriorating. Sontag’s growing suffocation and resentment towards her husband is documented in her journals, where she referred to Rieff as an “emotional totalitarian,” but also as a “male virgin”—writing of “his sentimentality, his low vitality, his innocence” and comparing him to Cassaubon, the pompous scholar-husband in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. Rieff expected Sontag to play the part of the traditional Jewish

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag to Paul Tillich, n.d., PTP, bMS 649/187.

<sup>6</sup> Acocella, “The Hunger Artist.”

<sup>7</sup> James Luther Adams, correspondence with Philip Rieff, collection of Jonathan Imber.

wife, a role to which she was uniquely unsuited. Sontag was also drawn to the more exuberant styles and pleasures of the emergent youth culture, which Rieff regarded with mandarin disdain. The year Sontag spent abroad, first at Oxford and then in Paris, proved to be the breaking point; when she returned, she informed Philip of her decision to leave him. Albeit not without guilt, as her journal records:

He cares so fiercely for his domestic sanctuary, for David and me, so little for anyone else—...Such a life, such a temperament, is not easily repaired when damaged. P is a bleeder, in fact physically, and emotionally, too. He won't die of this grief but neither will he ever recover from it.

Rieff was more maudlin: "I shall die before I am forty," he wrote to her.<sup>8</sup>

Sontag and Rieff's marriage and divorce has become the stuff of New York legend and an example of how the closely-knit intellectual elite of the 1950s fractured into liberationist and revanchist strands. Sontag, of course, went on to fame and success as one of the reigning New York literary personalities of the 1960s and beyond. As for Rieff, Sontag's predictions about him proved more accurate than his own: he did not die before forty, but neither did he ever quite recover from the failure of his marriage, which he seems to have equated in his own mind with Kierkegaard's notorious doomed engagement to Regina Olsen. Like his hero Kierkegaard, Rieff deliberately courted obscurity and unintelligibility, retreating after the publication of *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* into an acerbic, conservative, and affected teacher-scholar persona and becoming increasingly isolated from any kind of reading public. As Ross Posnock has written, Rieff "made humiliation serve his career: he turned his wounded, in-between status into an elaborate, highly

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963*, ed. David Rieff (New York: Picador, 2008), 195, 209.

allusive, and self-conscious project of worldly renunciation that became the measure, for him, of the intellectual's integrity."<sup>9</sup>

Although neither Rieff nor Sontag spoke publicly about their marriage very often, the image of cultural and intellectual nemesis painted by each critic in their best-known books was rooted in an experience of intimate antagonism. As Posnock writes, "what proved of value to them in their often miserable union was that each came to embody almost everything the other loathed, a mutual contempt that doubtless added urgency and vividness to their subsequent writing."<sup>10</sup> For Rieff, that nemesis was the publicity- and experience-hungry narcissist, in flight from inwardness. For Sontag, it was the stodgy and authoritarian critic, afraid of life. Rieff is "the interpreter" of Sontag's *Against Interpretation*. Rieff's "psychological man" turns out to have been a psychological woman. Only late in life, after Sontag's cultural politics took a more conservative and elitist turn, do the two seem to have had some sort of reconciliation, and Rieff dedicated one of his posthumously published books "To Susan Sontag, In Remembrance." (This was in place of the earlier dedication Rieff had written in the page proofs, "to the memory of the second commandment," the commandment against idolatry.)<sup>11</sup>

How Tillich felt about his friends' divorce has been lost to posterity. In 1959, after her return from Europe, Sontag wrote him a letter asking for a recommendation for a teaching job at Sarah Lawrence and surmising that Rieff had

<sup>9</sup> Ross Posnock, "Under the Sign of Sontag: Philip Rieff and the Uses of Humiliation," *Raritan* 29, no. 4 (Spring 2010), 50.

<sup>10</sup> Posnock, "Under the Sign of Sontag," 53.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Rieff, *My Life Among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), vi; Jonathan Imber, "Philip Rieff: A Personal Remembrance," *Society* 44, no. 1 (November 2016), 75.

already informed him of the collapse of the marriage (“I know he must have given you a long and extremely aggrieved account of what happened”). Without elaborating, she pleaded that there was another side of the story – “I suppose there always is” – and expressed her hope that “I have not lost your friendship or that of your wife because we two are two no longer.”<sup>12</sup> Tillich’s response is lost, although a variety of evidence points to the possibility of his having played some role in the entire drama. Tillich and Sontag’s relationship seems to have been warm; a photograph of the two from the late 1950s, taken by Tillich’s daughter Mutie (with whom Sontag was also friends), shows them standing arm-in-arm in a very comfortable pose. Tillich, it will be remembered, was in the habit of advising his female friends to “avoid the pitfalls of compulsive self-giving,” as the Paucks put it, “which he felt was the great danger implicit in the monogamous relationship.”<sup>13</sup>

A fascinating entry from Sontag’s journal from 1956 outlines some ideas for a proposed (never-written) essay on marriage, obviously inspired by her own mounting unhappiness but also, apparently, by Tillich’s views on the subject. One of the jotted-down ideas reads:

Tillich: the marriage vow is idolatric (places one moment above all others, gives that moment right to determine all the future ones). Monogamy, too. He spoke disparagingly of the “extreme monogamy” of the Jews.  
 Rilke thought the only way to keep love in marriage was by perpetual acts of separation-return.  
 The leakage of talk in marriage.  
 (My marriage, anyway.)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Sontag to Tillich, bMS 649/187.

<sup>13</sup> Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Sontag, *Reborn*, 89.

It is a tangle of ironies that this characteristically skeptical view of vows on Tillich's part (which obviously played a role in the ordeal of his own marriage) and his uncharacteristically harsh assessment of Judaism (towards which Tillich as a general rule was scrupulously respectful, personally as well as theologically) should have combined to play a role in eroding the marriage of Philip Rieff, a man who five years earlier had hailed Tillich, in a review of the first volume of *Systematic Theology*, as "the most Judaic of all Protestant theologians."<sup>15</sup> To the memory of the second commandment indeed!

At some point in 1960 or 1961, Rieff and Tillich had a personal falling-out, the exact nature of which remains obscure. Perhaps Tillich spoke up on behalf of Sontag's perspective. Perhaps Rieff felt that the theologian had provided intellectual support for her decision to leave. Perhaps something more serious happened. Tillich seems to have written a letter to Rieff, to which Rieff responded with an angry letter of his own. Both men's letters – and with them, the cause of their rupture – are lost, seemingly expunged from the Tillich archive; all that remains are a few scattered references to the exchange and Tillich's tentative attempts at reconciliation. In November, Tillich wrote to Herbert and Inge Marcuse asking for advice, it would appear not for the first time: "Since both of you helped me in this matter, I would be grateful if you would give me an advice how best I should react to his reaction—which I think is very regrettable." Marcuse advised Tillich not to respond: "Let him think!"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Philip Rieff, "Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*," in *The Feeling Intellect: Selected Writings*, ed. Jonathan Imber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 135.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Tillich to Herbert Marcuse, November 17, 1960, PTP, bMS 649/164.

Tillich seems to have followed Marcuse's advice; the next piece of correspondence between Rieff and Tillich is a letter from December 1961 in which Rieff, who was being considered for the job he ultimately landed in the University of Pennsylvania's sociology department, asked whether Tillich would still be willing to write a letter of recommendation, "as in former times." Tillich responded reassuring Rieff that he was always willing to write and that "Nothing has changed in this or any other respect." He wished Rieff "a very good or shall I say much better New Year" and also suggested that they have a talk the next time Rieff came east. In the midst of this exchange, Rieff was one of a batch of people whom Tillich's secretary had mailed an offprint of Tillich's sermon, "Forgetting and Being Forgotten." Rieff, still in despair over the divorce, seems to have read a larger significance into this gesture, thanking Tillich icily for "that appropriate offprint." Tillich reassured him that "the arrival of the sermon at this time was completely coincidental." Their correspondence ends in 1961.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever transpired between them, it seems to have permanently soured Rieff on Tillich. Far from "the most Judaic of all Protestant theologians," Tillich became, for Rieff, the theologian of psychological man, an emblem – like Sontag – of everything Rieff feared and loathed. In *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Rieff lumped Tillich together with D.H. Lawrence and Carl Jung as "psychologizers of faith" and accused him of having adopted Lawrence's gospel of eroticism. His theology, meanwhile, Rieff called "tepid holy water" and a "default of thought in some of the

<sup>17</sup> Tillich and Rieff correspondence, PTP, bMS 649/178.



highest reaches of contemporary Christian theology.”<sup>18</sup> In one of the lengthy, discursive footnotes in *Fellow Teachers* (1973), the book that marked Rieff’s full-blown transformation into a cultural reactionary, he included a discussion of Tillich that is somewhat hard to parse due to its seemingly deliberate obscurity but that obviously carried a tone of embittered disparagement. After referencing Tillich’s “completion of the Schleiermachian psychologizing in the Protestant tradition” and his “ambiguous relations to both political and sexvolution,” Rieff quotes, with horror, Tillich’s idea of the “existential ‘transmoral conscience,’” which “has no special demands; it speaks to us in the ‘mode of silence.’ It tells us only to act and to become guilty by acting, for every action is unscrupulous.” Rieff commented:

What a terrible narrowing to declare that "existence as such is guilty." Equally narrowing: the doctrine that "we *must* act, and the attitude in which we *can* act is 'resoluteness.' Resoluteness transcends the moral conscience, its arguments and prohibitions." Tillich concludes, rather blandly, hands folded, as if delivering a lecture: "The way from Luther to Heidegger's idea of a transmoral conscience was a dangerous one". Tillich does consider the open possibility, of guiltlessness, but slides out of the narrows with the standard ease. "*The good, transmoral conscience consists in the acceptance of the bad, moral conscience.*" *Acceptance*, indeed.<sup>19</sup>

Again, it is difficult to tell what is going on here, but Rieff seems to have regarded Tillich’s theology of ontological acceptance as a sophisticated dodge from the moralistic interdicts which Rieff considered to be the root of all culture. There was truth in Norman O. Brown’s comment that the persona Rieff adopted in *Fellow Teachers* was that of the Grand Inquisitor.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rieff, *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, 89, 223.

<sup>19</sup> Rieff, *Fellow-Teachers*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Norman O. Brown, “Philip Rieff’s ‘Fellow Teachers,’” *Salmagundi*, no. 24 (Fall 1973), 37. “It is no surprise,” wrote Brown, “If you remember his picture of the teacher as Grand Inquisitor, that the Moses of Rieff is the Moses of the Ten Commandments only, ‘a supreme interdictory figure.’ Moses at no point appears as the Moses who led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, Moses the liberator. He is

One of the central themes of *Fellow-Teachers* was the corruption of the intellect by publicity; Rieff painted the university as a sacred temple that was the best hope for saving “this society from its cruel infatuations with one damnable simplification after another. The most complex analyses grow brutally simple as they become public objects.” Only by reinvesting teachers with the authority of tradition was it possible to escape barbarousness; scholars themselves betrayed and compromised that authority when they courted public success and recognition as “public intellectuals.” What was needed, Rieff thought, was a renaissance of guilt, punishment, and authority within the sacred confines of learning. “True criticism,” he wrote, “is constituted, first, by repeating what is already known. The great teacher is he who, because he carries in himself what is already known, can transfer it to his student; that inwardness is his absolute and irreducible authority. If a student fails to recognize that authority, then he is not a student.” At the end of *Fellow-Teachers*, Rieff announced that the book was his exit from the public stage – he would not permit himself “another public episode”; much less would he allow himself to be “guru-ized.”<sup>21</sup> He kept to his word until the very end of his life, when

simply the author of the Ten Commandments, an interdictory figure. Even Jesus—we are still speaking of Jews—even Jesus is transformed by Rieff into an interdictory figure: ‘Jesus is a tremendous reviver of the interdicts. He came explicitly to deepen the law, not to abolish it.’ There is, from my point of view, a misquotation here, a mistranslation. The word in the New Testament text says that Jesus came to fulfill the law; Christian theology interprets the passage as meaning that by fulfilling the law, ultimately by the crucifixion, he paid off in full the debt owing to the angry father figure, and thus liberated the sons from the angry father figure and the Grand Inquisitor. In an uncanny moment in Rieff’s address he amends the seven last words of Jesus on the cross as truthfully he says a Freudian would have heard them spoken, not as a Jew of culture would hear them spoken: ‘father, father, why have we forsaken thee?’ From the Christian point of view we must return from this blasphemous alteration of the text to the original ‘father, father, why hast thou forsaken me?’ It is his moment of liberation. Whereas Rieff says we should be grateful for our sense of guilt, Jesus came to preach forgiveness. There is no forgiveness in Rieff that I can see. Jesus preached remission of sins, but Rieff uses the word remissive as if it were permissive, anarchic, orgiastic, a bad word.” 41-2.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5, 117, 208.

he finally allowed former students to edit and publish several of the book manuscripts he had written over the decades.<sup>22</sup>

Sontag, who had known this type of thinking intimately during their marriage and whose extremely public career was in some ways a defiant response to it, had little patience. In an interview with the editors of *Salmagundi*, the journal that had published Rieff's *Fellow Teachers*, she said,

Making a virtue of its own historical inappropriateness to the late 20th century, Rieff's authoritarian theory of the university parallels the authoritarian theory of the bourgeois state advanced in Germany and France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The substance and the sociological moorings of the teacher's authority having been eroded, only its form remains. Authority itself ("that inwardness") is made the defining characteristic of the great teacher. Perhaps one only stakes out such a large, truculent claim to authority when one doesn't, can't possibly, have it.<sup>23</sup>

Although she softened in this view somewhat toward the end of her life, Sontag was indubitably the best known critic of the kind of "inwardness" for which Rieff considered himself a martyr. It is remarkable that 1973, the year when this exchange took place, was also the year when Hannah and Rollo May published their dueling portraits of Tillich, in which his many affairs and sexual adventures were publicly aired.

What was at stake in this argument – and in the larger divergence of Rieff and Sontag's careers – was in many ways representative of the divisions that

<sup>22</sup> See *Charisma: The Gift of Grace and How It Has Been Taken Away From Us* (New York: Vintage, 2007) and the "Sacred Order/Social Order" trilogy, including *My Life Among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006); *The Crisis of the Officer Class: The Decline of the Tragic Sensibility* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008); and *The Jew of Culture: Freud, Moses, and Modernity* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Susan Sontag, interview with Robert Boyers and Maxine Berinstein, "Women, the Arts, and the Politics of Culture," *Salmagundi*, no. 31/32 (Fall 1975/Winter 1976): 29-48.

scarred the cultural landscape of the 1960s and that in some ways have become even more pronounced in our own time: between depth and surface as aesthetic ideals, between religion and psychology as languages of the self, between morality and acceptance as approaches to guilt, between tradition and freedom as orientations towards history, between loyalty and openness as approaches to marriage. These conflicts are of course contingent and historical – subject to the idiosyncrasies of cultural circumstance and individual personality – but they also represent universal tensions in being that are never resolved within history except in fragmentary and ambiguous ways.

Tillich's figure hangs over these conflicts. His great power as a thinker was that he represented a way of synthesis, a possibility of holding the great contradictions of which he was so vividly aware, in himself and in the world, in productive, dynamic tension and expectation. The ambiguity of Tillich as a person is that he also eased the way for the new order of division and confrontation – in the case of Rieff and Sontag perhaps even in a painfully personal way. His was a project of reunion and reunification that failed for its time, in no small part due to his own flaws and disruptions. Yet his thought stands as an expression of hope that there is unity in spite of those disruptions.

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