

Tillich's Theological Philosophy: The Dialect of the Religious Symbol

Introduction:

In 1959, Paul Tillich was featured on the cover of Time magazine, a testament to his popular influence from the early 1950s until his death in 1965. Within his immense theological and philosophical works, he proposed that religions are encountered “either at a deep, existential level of experience, at a middle level of empathy and understanding, or at a detached and theoretical level” (James viii). This project seeks to enter the philosophical discourse of religion in the latter level, on the topic of epistemology of religious language, especially in regards to Tillich’s method of correlation and symbolic theory in *Systematic Theology*. Within this analysis, however, it is pertinent to recognize Tillich’s theology as residing in the deepest level of experience, as his method of correlation, which is central to explicating his existential inquiry, is driven by an apologetic and personal Christian ontology. Immediately, this raises questions regarding the appropriate level at which one should encounter philosophy of religion. Thus, in light of Martin Heidegger’s ontological influence on Tillich’s theological philosophy, this analysis will address the discourse of philosophy of religion and its epistemological boundaries within Tillich’s conceptualization of the religious symbol as dialectical. Emphasizing the way in which Tillich attempts to expand on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant to generate his own systematic theology, the continuous epistemological concern lies within the gap between faith and knowledge, and more importantly, how that gap is structured within a Christian framework as philosophically coherent.

The concept of a monotheistic God, although based on certain widespread presuppositions, has led philosophers to vastly different conclusions about the nature of divine powers and the role of revelation as a communicative link with humanity. The idea of God as transcendent begs the question of whether human knowledge of God’s nature and existence is possible. This comprehensibility of God directly affects notions of faith and what the criterion are for belief and certainty with regards to religious claims. With so many diverse philosophies, each asserting various versions of subjective truths, the modern philosopher is forced to ponder whether any semblance of truth can actually exist.

This is a critical issue in the philosophy of religion, as the existence of or nature of God inherently leads to metaphysical worries which directly correlate to one's teleology and lived experiences. For Tillich, the pervasive awareness of the ultimate concern desegregates the binary between the sacred and profane, as emphasized in his role as a theologian of culture. Furthermore, his delineation between the unconditioned and the unconditional or Being and being, in which God is paradoxically Being-itself, serves to express the transcendental nature of the ultimate concern. In this view, God as Being-itself is not a being with existence, but rather the essential power of being. Although his ontological structure and ultimate concern are religiously ambiguous or at least non-denominational, his theological use of symbols unabashedly perpetuates or at least privileges the Christian perspective. His method of correlation and its presupposed association with Christian symbols is unique in its blending of philosophy and theology, but this relationship is also problematized when analyzed in light of his concept of the theological circle and the pluralistic possibility of philosophically/rationally or phenomenologically/empirically founded religious claims.

In this regard, Tillich's expression of his theological duty and his desire for an apologetic position to preserve his faith may be argued as more akin to a therapeutic method of reassurance in regards to his existential worry, rather than an unbiased or logically cohesive philosophical pursuit. Furthermore, the question of whether Tillich's method of correlation and its structured religious symbolic language are epistemologically valid as philosophically cohesive truths, or whether such desired objectivity diminishes faith by way of a gnostic sacrilegious undermining, requires a reevaluation of the relative roles of philosophy and theology as disciplines with distinct objects and epistemological standards. According to the OED, theology is "the study of the nature of God and religious belief; religious beliefs and theory when systematically developed", whereas philosophy is "the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline; a particular system of philosophical thought; the study of the theoretical basis of a particular branch of knowledge" (OED). In this way, theology is focused on seeking the true

nature of a god, whereas philosophy addresses the foundations for that search. With philosophy of religion, however, this distinction is blurred, creating boundary issues between theology and philosophy.

Philosophy of Religion: A Practical Discipline

One of many in its field, Italo Mancini's essay, "What is Philosophy of Religion", postulates that "there is the need for philosophical inquiry, to make sense of religion" (Mancini 64). As evidenced by his essay title, and despite centuries of such philosophical inquiry into the religious, philosophy of religion still faces a certain conundrum in defining its objective and aim in relation to other fields, especially theology, as well as validating itself amongst the humanities under the pressure of the natural or "hard" empirical sciences. The limits of human reason and experience also create ramifications for the role of revelation and the church in regards to attaining knowledge of the divine. In this way, philosophy of religion must mediate the emotional and rational justifications for faith. This issue is the key starting point for many philosophies of religion, employing the argument that religious knowledge, whether revelatory or doctrinal, cannot be known in the same way history or natural sciences can be "objectively" evaluated. In this regard, Tillich is distinct, and his dialectical approach is more distinguished in its capacity for elasticity than empirical or rational appeals to indoctrinated or dogmatic apologetic philosophies.

Various differences in opinion on this issue can be categorized by their relative approaches through either logical reasoning or phenomenology, which creates a segregated binary of the rational and emotional or experiential in regards to what constitutes validated "truth" in the realm of religious epistemology. One philosopher who takes a negative stance towards religious knowledge is Walter Kaufmann in his *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, which places religious beliefs as stark opposites to the objective standard for knowledge in natural science fields. In his view, religious beliefs are unfounded empirically and therefore less certain than "true" objective knowledge. For Kaufmann,

knowledge is “the apprehension of what is eternal and immutable, while belief was identified with apprehension of the changing objects of our sense experience” (Kaufmann 108). In regard to this debate, however, it is also necessary to recognize the relative issues surrounding the connotative and semantic function of such words as faith, certainty, belief and knowledge. Furthermore, as knowledge can be segregated into an objective or subjective subcategory, there arises much debate around the conceptualization of what constitutes an academic field or discipline as valid or epistemologically sound.

For example, Kant has no qualms in admitting that “pure rational faith can never be transformed into knowledge by any natural data of reason and experience, because here the ground of holding true is merely subjective, namely a necessary need of reason (and as long as we are human beings it will always remain a need) to presuppose the existence of a highest being, but not to demonstrate it” (Kant 10). Kant recognizes the necessary employment of admitting what is useful and non-contradictory, and “...rational faith, which rests on a need of reason’s use with a practical intent, could be called a postulate of reason – not as if it were an insight which did justice to all the logical demands for certainty, but because this holding true is not inferior in degree to knowing, even though it is completely different from it in kind” (Kant 11). Contrarily, although Kaufmann’s essay on subjective truth recognizes the idea that “some people think that in addition to “objective” truth with which we deal in science we should recognize “subjective” truth which is allegedly legitimate in other contexts”, Kaufmann nonetheless quickly refutes this claim on the basis that subjectivity only “means that something is “true for me”. “Subjective” truth is a fond nickname for self-deception” (Kaufmann 35). Although it is also true that Kant’s faith is primarily rooted in hope, it is pertinent to recognize that Kant’s hope is undoubtedly different than the “virtue in believing without evidence” faith that Kaufmann so blatantly condemns (Kaufmann 114). For Kant, and Tillich, philosophical coherence and appeals to the practical sphere are adequately sufficient modes of securing or justifying their own personal faiths.

Kaufmann maintains that knowledge is distinguished from belief by the criterion of “evidence sufficient to compel the concurrence of every reasonable person”, rather than certainty (Kaufmann 109); he admits that this is much debated and unresolved issue, though, as it dates back to Plato; “The close connection between knowledge and evidence becomes particularly clear when we move from one field to another in which different standards of evidence obtain” (Kaufmann 112). On this topic, Tillich declares that “there is a necessary and distinct difference between ‘true’ and ‘absolute’ knowledge; this means that “no conditioned reality can claim unconditional status” (O’Neill 16). In this way, it could be argued that Tillich and Kaufmann conceptualize religious beliefs similarly, but that Tillich allows belief a greater degree of “truth” value than Kaufmann’s rigid denotation of objective and subjective knowledge. Furthermore, although Kaufmann’s position seems to halt philosophical pursuits within the epistemology of religion, Kaufmann actually adds an interesting twist in regard to knowledge within Christianity, such that “the Christian holds that knowledge is apprehension of changing sense objects, while belief alone can grasp what is eternal and immutable; and belief is held to be superior because it alone is certain” (Kaufmann 109). This conceptualization of Christianity is actually very aligned with Tillich’s method of correlation as a dialectical framework for philosophical inquiry into religious existential concerns. In this way, Tillich agrees with Kaufmann on the necessity of a malleable “answering” position because of Tillich’s prioritization of the changing human situation in relation to the ultimate concern.

An additional aspect is the necessarily methodological differentiation between religious philosophy and philosophy of religion. In this case, according to Mancini, both religious philosophy and theology are based in “pure proclamation”, whereas philosophy of religion “investigates religion without ever trying totally to resolve it into a gnosis” (Mancini 65). Unlike theology, philosophy of religion should not seek to declare the true nature of any deity, but should focus on the foundations for those declarations. Whereas faith often falls to the side of religious philosophy, or theology, driven by the more personal means of emotion and phenomenology, a philosophy of religion rooted in reason is

more political, as it demands “a religion accessible to all who share common reason, and for a religion communicated by conviction rather than by violence to human dignity through force (carrot or stick)” (Mancini 64). In this light, Tillich is attempting to do philosophy of religion because he prioritizes philosophical thought over phenomenology. Although he stresses the importance of culture and the current situation, he never elevates his personal beliefs beyond their rational capacity. He is similar to Kant in his deconstruction of religious institutions, yet unlike Kant, he preserves the symbolic value of these constructions.

Although Kant’s epistemology leaves certain questions unanswerable within the limits of human reason, he ultimately aimed to construct a system of postulates constituting pragmatically justifiable faith; “The biblical sense of religious experience stresses exactly the opposite view to that supported by Kant. It stresses election (as against common reason), the radical break and paradox (as against rational continuity)” (Mancini 64). In concordance with this line of reasoning, Mancini argues that prioritization of reason over phenomenology preserves philosophy of religion as a discipline, as an experientially driven philosophy of religion would open the door to a gnostic pluralism. John Hick also expresses concern regarding the possibility of pluralism as a result of a rationally defended phenomenology. He states, “From the point of view of a Christian philosopher – as distinguished from a philosopher simply as such – there is, however, an obvious challenge to this in the fact that the same epistemological principle establishes the rationality of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. in holding beliefs that are at least partly, and sometimes quite radically, incompatible with the Christian belief-system” (Hick 25). Thus, it seems that phenomenology on its own can not suffice as a credible philosophy of religion, which Tillich acknowledges through his necessitation of the symbolic with regard to his method of correlation. This approach avoids dogma by circumventing the inherently problematic nature of doctrine driven beliefs.

Mancini further advocates that “if we take philosophy of religion as a critical consciousness of theology”, then “a good way of looking at philosophy of religion is that upheld and defended by Kant,

who in this was a disciple of Rousseau” (Mancini 64). Although both philosophers agree on the non-rationality of indoctrinated dogma, they proffer very different epistemologies. In the much debated opposition between feeling and reasoning as epistemological standards, Rousseau and Kant stand as two major voices, where Rousseau, as the father of Romanticism, preaches against the Enlightenment values for which Kant advocates. Furthermore, although Rousseau does employ rational argument, he primarily contended that certainty about religious truths is found in feeling. In his view, rational argumentation is limited to the theoretical, whereas the immediacy of experience and feeling provide a more practical and reliable source. In this regard, Hegel takes a comparable philosophical position. Hegel describes the importance and possibility of universality through his ideas on consciousness.

Quite contra to Kant, he argues that consciousness is “the subjectively knowing spirit for which God is object. From this it follows that God can be known or cognized, for it is God’s nature to reveal himself, to be manifest. Those who say that God is not revelatory do not speak from the standpoint of the Christian religion at any rate, for the Christian religion is called the revealed religion” (Hegel 130). Hegel further alienates Kant from a personal Christianity by stating that the content of Christianity “is that God is revealed to human beings, that they know what God is” (Hegel 130). Whereas Kant denies the human capacity to receive revelation or have knowledge of God, Hegel denies the gap between God and humanity by elevating the human capacity to receive divine revelations that are distinct from pure rationality. Hegel substitutes a personal consciousness for Kant’s standard rationalism, in a way that is comparable to Tillich’s conceptualization of Being. With all of these approaches, however, the importance of a link to the practical is established as a means of mediating the polarity of the a priori and a posteriori. In this way, Tillich uniquely balances Kant and Hegel through his portrayal of symbolic “grasping”.

Hegel advocates, “the universal is, to begin with, the consciousness of God. It is not just consciousness but, more precisely, it is certainty, too... certainty inasmuch as it is feeling and exists in feeling” (Hegel 133). However, this consciousness is part of the process of elevation, in which “First

of all we have the consciousness of God in general... What we are conscious of, however, is not only that we have this object as our representation also that it is not merely representation, that it is. That is certainty of God, immediate knowledge” (Hegel 134). Whereas Kant uses a rational explication of a moral universe to conclude there may exist a God, Hegel relies on innate feelings and personal convictions as sufficient for certainty. In this regard, Tillich mediates their two extremes. Hegel views our representations of God as personal and unique to the self, but God’s actual existence is independent of those representations, meaning that we have a consciousness of God as what he represents to us personally, but we also know that God actually exists, independently from our ideas of him. This independence from individual representation is what allows Hegel’s God to be universal. In this way, both Kant and Hegel agree that God and his existence is a notion universal and independent from individually constructed ideas, just as Tillich posits the difference between Being and being, or the unconditional and the conditioned, in relation to the ultimate concern, such that Being or the unconditional represent that which we are aware of but cannot fully grasp and being or the conditioned is the expression of that which we try to grasp as a hermeneutic method.

Kant is blatantly contra to Hegel in his conception of God on this ground: “The concept of God and even the conviction of his existence can be met with only in reason, and it cannot first come to us either through inspiration or through tidings communicated to us, however great the authority behind them” (Kant 10). Hegel reverts Kant’s necessary progress from rationality to revelation. For Kant, the rationality is the standard to which all else must not contradict. He argues that if one comes across immediate intuitions of God, “then a concept of God must serve to gauge whether this appearance agrees with all the characteristics required for a Deity” (Kant 10). However, one must remember that Kant does not hold metaphysical knowledge as within the capacity of human cognition. Therefore, God must simply not contradict rationality, such that these beliefs “would have to hold it up to my rational concept of God and test it accordingly – not as to whether it is adequate to that concept, but merely whether it does not contradict it” (Kant 10). Through this logic, Kant confirms that “no one can

first be convinced of the existence of a highest being through any intuition; rational faith must come first, and then certain appearances or disclosures could at most provide the occasion for investigating whether we are warranted in taking what speaks or presents itself to us to be a Deity” (Kant 11). Rationality allows one to maintain a cohesive philosophy of religion within sensible experiences. Although Tillich also employs cohesiveness as a measure of investigation, he is not satisfied with the limits that Kant’s technical rationality creates. Kant concludes by urging readers to “accept what appears to you most worthy of belief after careful and sincere examination whether of facts or rational grounds” (Kant 12). For Kant, a moral philosophy is rationally pragmatic, and this moral philosophy requires a divine governor in order to preserve his ideas of a summum bonum, but for Tillich, philosophy of religion should surpass such personalized subjectivity while maintaining a critical awareness to avoid dogmatism.

Most important to Kant’s philosophy of religion is his distinction between reason in its theoretical and practical uses. In this way, Kaufmann is correct that Kant cannot theoretically appeal to God. Kant can, however, practically appeal to God. Additionally, he argues that the need for practical reason is more important “because it is unconditioned, and we are necessitated to presuppose the existence of God not only if we want to judge, but because we have to judge” (Kant 8). This appeal to “the pure practical use of reason consists in the precepts of moral laws” which lead “to the idea of the highest good possible in the world insofar as it is possible only through freedom: morality” (Kant 8). Kant’s rationality transcends the mere wishful thinking negated by Kaufmann because Kant necessitates God via morals. Kant does not want morals to be dependent on religion. This is an important distinction: we do not have morals because of theology, but we need a supreme being because of Kant’s moral philosophy; “Thus it is not cognition but a felt need of reason” (Kant 8). He recognizes that his is not an objective principle; it is subjective, but that does not entail its devaluation, as Kaufmann would argue. Kant retains the value in that he is not defending an emotive religious claim, but a “Rational belief or faith”: “only a rational belief or faith is one grounded on no data other

than those contained in pure reason. All believing is a holding true which is subjectively sufficient, but consciously regarded as objectively insufficient; thus it is contrasted with knowing” (Kant 9). Unlike Kaufmann, Kant finds sufficiency in rational clarity; Kant sees the inability to gain empirical knowledge in this field not as indicative of its negative certainty, but only as a fault in regards to the capacity of human epistemology. This issue of certainty is wholly linked to the individual philosopher’s criterion for knowledge as a result of his or her philosophy on the capacity and scope of human knowledge. For Tillich, although the practical link is essential, he also wishes to construct a theoretical space for theology, such that even though God’s existence may not be deduced, one could nonetheless gain ontological understanding through theological answers. Thus, he constructs his method of correlation as a way to supplant Kant’s moral appeal to the divine. With his method of correlation, Tillich proffers the friendliest option for preserving a sense of the universal and personal while maintaining a systematic theory of ontological hermeneutics.

Mancini uses the phrase “Utopia of philosophy of religion” to describe the problematic approach to religion through reason alone. He uses “Utopia in the sense that the concept is never adequate to the reality it is trying to define,” which produces a “negative dialectic in which no subject is ever identical with its predicate” (Mancini 65). For Rousseau, and other phenomenologists, the innate feelings of assurance in a supersensory world are undeniable because of their “real” presence in the practical sphere. In this latter regard, Kant can be seen as partially on the same page as Rousseau, in that Kant also turned towards the pragmatic in order to qualify his claims, although his undeniable reality is rooted in morality. In regards to Mancini’s critique, Kant’s proffered moral philosophy is undeniably idealistic, despite his desired link to the practical sphere. Furthermore, within Kantian philosophy, there is a mutual relationship between his own faith and reason, as he appeals to “pragmatic reason” solely the account of morality to defend his own faith, primarily because his approach through reason alone was incapable of justifying his own faith. Tillich, however, aims precisely at overcoming this idealism through his use of the symbolic.

Thus, Tillich attempts to expand Kantian philosophy to be more theologically friendly. Tillich even acknowledges Kant's prominence in philosophy: "In my student years, there was a slogan often repeated: Understanding Kant means transcending Kant. We all try to do this" (Firestone 128). As he remains a prominent figure in modern philosophy, Kant's critical philosophy has been upheld for the way in which he synthesized rationalism and empiricism, in which the former posits that reason unlocks a priori ideas and the latter claims that knowledge derives from experience. Against this dichotomy, Kant argues that without the aid of reason, experience is purely subjective, and in contrast, reason alone can only result in theoretical hypotheses. Although Kant argues against this dichotomy and indeed appeals to morality in the practical sphere, his philosophical system nonetheless fails to meet Tillich's desired standards. Kant does mediate pure reason and empiricism via his appeal to pragmatic morality, but this appeal does not leave space for humanity to attain religious knowledge, which is where Tillich's method of correlation becomes the more viable option.

Kant argues that "human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structure all our experience; and that human reason gives itself the moral law, which is our basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality" (SEP). Thus, in his view, empirical knowledge, morality and faith are coherently stable through their mutual foundation in human autonomy, which also serves his proposed teleology of "reflecting judgment" that bridges the theoretical and practical parts of his philosophical system" (SEP). Likewise, Tillich's teleology is motivated by his desired soteriology, which requires religious symbols as revelatory rather than autonomous human cognition. In contrast to Kant's moral and empirical truths, Tillich creates a gray area for a certain kind of "truth" that is finite and changeable in relation to the human situation. Kant's pragmatic rationalization of religious faith differs from that of Tillich, but both philosophers nonetheless wish to philosophically found their faith via conceptual structures in a practical, rather than purely phenomenological, manner that privileges the authority of philosophy over paradox as proclamation.

The Ultimate Concern: Being

It seems that Kaufmann's mistake is his tendency to frame philosophies of religion only within the constructs of organized or established religions, which prioritize proclamation and paradox.

Although monotheism often contains certain premises of God as divine, transcendent, omniscient and all-powerful, one can certainly philosophize about the existence and nature of a monotheistic God that is not historically constrained to the Bible, Quran or Torah. Kant and Hegel both recognize the non-verifiability of culturally constructed theologies, but that does not mean that they have the same ideas for how religious beliefs may or may not be attained. Kaufmann simply fails to see the alternate forms of rationality and certainty that these philosophers argue for because their standards for sufficiency, which are humanistic rather than scientific, are different from his own. In contrast to both Kaufmann and Kant, Hegel and Tillich both found their faith in their respective arguments for an inner consciousness and awareness of the Christian God. In this way, Tillich not only demythologizes the historicity of Biblical narrative in a way that preserves the Christian symbolism of his faith, but he also mediates the extremes of phenomenology and rationality that Kant and Hegel epitomize in such a systematic way that his method of correlation can be likened to a more objective method than "pure reason" or "pure feeling" as he delineates the relative roles of each discipline and the way in which they should necessarily work together to produce "answers".

Nonetheless, the presence of Christianity within philosophies of religion, especially within an apologetic philosophy such as Tillich's, begs the question of which came first, faith or philosophical reason, as it appears that philosophers of religion often have a personal motive of faith preservation. For Kierkegaard, whose central philosophy is that humans have an experience of a call to which they should respond with faith, "rational investigation belonged to philosophical discourse, whereas the distinctive characteristic of the Christian is the paradox" (Mancini 64). In turn, Heidegger, whose concept of "Dasein" as "Being" is central to Tillich's ontology, actually criticized Kierkegaard for lacking an ontology. Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, however, could have been educated by the

traditional theological view that faith is a response to God's grace, whereas Kant and Tillich seem more eager to justify faith as philosophically attainable or defensible. This delineation is further complicated by ideas of "faith" as a unique form of knowledge; "Thus there is a sense of religion and faith which transcends and almost mocks philosophical inquiry. Faith has its reason which reason does not know" (Mancini 65). Regardless of these philosophers' relative ideas regarding faith, there still exists a desire to establish faith as validated through philosophical appeals to universality or the practical sphere. For Hegel, an appeal to consciousness begins in his concept of God as truth.

Hegel writes, "The beginning of religion, more precisely its content, is the concept of religion itself, that God is the absolute truth, the truth of all things, and subjectively that religion alone is the absolutely true knowledge" (Hegel 114). Unlike the Kantian admittance of a lack of metaphysical knowledge, Hegel believes that those "for us who have religion, what God is, is something well-known, a content that can be presupposed in subjective consciousness" (Hegel 115). Hegel describes God as the result of philosophy, yet also the beginning since it results from itself, meaning that God is not just the beginning but also the end or result. Whereas Kant's philosophy is founded on pragmatic rationality, Hegel thinks universality is the necessary component. Thus, "God in his universality, this universal in which there is no limitation, finitude, or particularity, is the absolute subsistence and is so alone" (Hegel 117). However, Hegel arguably admits that rationality is a human universal. This type of consciousness can be compared to Friedrich Schleiermacher's "God consciousness", "which is his term for the inherent awareness of God in human cognition, is mediated through 'particular determinations'" (O'Neill 20). For Schleiermacher, "The unconscious sense or feeling is passively present, but once reflected upon, becomes actively mediated, or conditioned, by the act of reflection" (O'Neill 20). In Tillich's philosophy, the awareness of the ontological concept of Being makes possible the dialectical approach, such that his theory of symbols allows for humanity to "grasp" revelation in a way that is always related to the changing human situation.

Thus, just as “the concept of ‘ontological awareness’ maintains that revelation can only be perceived if the God-given capacity to receive it is already inherent in the observer”, Tillich’s understanding of faith calls for the possibility of revelation. Tillich writes, “The risk of faith is based on the fact that the unconditional element can become a matter of ultimate concern only if it appears in a concrete embodiment” (Tillich, *Theology of Culture* 28). The concrete embodiment of the ultimate concern “includes mythological symbols and theological concepts, ritual and sacrament, demands for social justice, and even the honesty of scientific investigation” (O’Neill 20). For Tillich, “the risk of faith does not involve assertions that have greater or lesser degrees of probability for being discovered to be true in the future; it is not arbitrariness” (O’Neill 20). Rather, he writes, “‘faith is an existential risk, in which the concrete expressions of humanity - its cultural and religious symbols – are judged in terms of their unity or disunity with ultimate concern” (O’Neill 20). The ontological approach to faith describes the way in which one expresses his or her experiences of the power of Being-itself, which all are inherently aware of, in both cultural and religious contexts, and then the way in which those expressions are related to that power. In this way, Tillich’s desire for coherence is not that different from Kant’s admittance of religious beliefs as only needing to not contradict reason. The unity that Tillich speaks of does transcend pure reason, though, in that he appeals to ontological reason, rather than “technical reason”. Furthermore, his use of a dialectical method allows him to avoid the inherent issue of infallibility as symbols cannot be substituted for more technical or literal language, thus preserving their presence as non-doctrinal and non-dogmatic through their universal participation in Being.

Tillich’s resistance to assertions of probability is also Heideggerian, as Heidegger argued that the nature of Dasein is obscured when conceptually bound by everyday language and logic. For both philosophers, ontology is the doorway to examining one’s existence in relation to life, death and truth. Just as Tillich necessitates the use of the symbolic, Heidegger also believed that the question of Dasein could not be addressed within the bounds of scientific research. Heidegger writes, “Scientific research

is not the only manner of Being which this entity can have, nor is it the one which lies closest. Moreover, Dasein itself has a special distinctiveness as compared with other entities,” such that its own nature is an issue of itself, as “Being is always the Being of an entity.” (Heidegger 32, 29). Given that “Being” is such a recursive subject, Tillich posits that “theology includes human participation in a discussion in which revealed truth can be understood and misunderstood, interpretations proposed and countered” (O’Neill 34). Thus, his approach completely avoids dogma and doctrine as delivered by the church, such that he necessitates the personal approach to philosophy of religion as a process that seeks understanding. The role of revelation facilitates this understanding, but he does not declare it an ultimate or unchanging authority.

Participation in Being, for Tillich, is the universal that paves the way for discovery of “truth” through discussion. Revelation, for Tillich, is not one directional, hence his denial of the paradox in favor of dialectic. Additionally, whereas the paradox functions as assertive, dialectic facilitates discovery. Tillich argues that existential inquiry cannot reduce cognition to either abstraction or to empiricism because “both are limited by a one-sided emphasis on the basis of knowledge as either subjective or objective. Thus, Tillich proposes that existence is ‘encounter’; that is, the mutual participation of subject and object, which is reflected in the act of cognition” (O’Neill 41). This relates back to Tillich’s three levels of knowing, such that the encounters that shape understanding occur at the middle level, whereas the theological answers and symbolic language require participation in the deepest level of encounter. The type of encounter in which Tillich is primarily making use of for his theology is revelation. Just as Schleiermacher necessitates an inherent capability, Tillich posits that “Humanity must be capable of interacting with revelation, if only to know that what it takes as revelation is revealed, and not something which has bubbled up out of the conflicts, both cognitive and existential, of human life” (O’Neill 41). The primacy of the human situation and participation create a unique conceptualization of revelation within Tillich’s proffered philosophical system. Tillich explicates, “The existential question, namely, man himself in the conflicts of his existential situation,

is not the source for the revelatory answer formulated by theology” (Tillich, *ST II* 13). Furthermore, “If God were not also in man so that man could ask for God, God’s speaking to man could not be perceived by man” (Tillich, *ST III* 127). Thus, the aim of Tillich’s system is to root revelation in his ontological structuring without sacrificing the apologetic element of his faith.

O’Neill questions Tillich’s prioritization of the apologetic, such that “If the aim of an apologetic, or answering, theology is to frame the revelatory answers to existential questions, what is the role of philosophy in the process of formulating the questions themselves?” (O’Neill 41). To this answer, it seems that O’Neill is being overly didactic in his differentiation between the disciplines. Part of Tillich’s philosophical approach is the inherent recognition that such disciplines are in themselves products of our own desire for categorization. Nonetheless, Tillich does participate in such categorization, such that he understands theology as seeking meaning whereas philosophy seeks to understand the structures of meaning, or Being, in Tillich’s case. The distinction of Being and being are again pertinent to understanding the way in which Tillich melds together his method of correlation. Furthermore, for Tillich, philosophy formalizes and objectifies, but is involved in the task of theology because it allows for critical analysis of the human situation and one’s experiences of Being. Thus, his method of correlation seeks to relate “questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message”, such that theology is responsible for the answers by employing the symbols of revelation (Tillich *ST I* 8). Although philosophy is the driving force for the inquiry, that is the existential questions, Tillich does not segregate the function of philosophy from theology. Rather, as stated previously, Tillich denotes the relative roles of each only in regard to their necessary cohesion. Tillich writes, “Philosophy necessarily asks the question of reality as a whole, the question of the structure of being. Theology necessarily asks the same question, for that which concerns us ultimately belongs to reality as a whole it must belong to Being” (Tillich, *ST I* 20-21). In his method, although existential philosophy does ask questions about reality as a whole and about the structures of Being, apologetic theology is likewise methodologically responsible for asking those questions.

Ontological Reason as Transcendent

Tillich's philosophy certainly correlates to the idea of the church providing knowledge as biased and not based in reason, since cultural influences are too subjective to personal desires rather than pure truth. In this light, Tillich seems to be almost on the same page as Kant, since morality is certainly Kant's ultimate concern, rather than God as Being-itself. Like Kant, Tillich argues that we should not come to know God through institutions, or symbolic systems, because "in all these cases the risk of faith is an existential risk, a risk in which the meaning and fulfillment of our lives is at stake, and not a theoretical judgment which may be refuted sooner or later" (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 262). As a student, Tillich learned that "Kant's philosophy is a transcendental system with theoretical and practical realms that develops into an inconclusive series of efforts at overcoming the gap between nature and freedom" (Firestone 128). Tillich's insight into the transcendental nature of religious reflection motivates his desire to link the practical with the theoretical in a systematic philosophy of religion.

Kant's influence on Tillich has been recognized, as Victor Nuovo states that his Ph.D. dissertations "may be viewed as attempts, through Schellingian concepts, to overcome the Kantian antithesis of historical faith and moral religion, and to provide a metaphysical basis for Kant's doctrine of radical evil and the self-estrangement of the autonomous moral will" (Firestone 128). For Tillich, "and this is the creative aspect of his interpretation, the essential insight in Kant's philosophy is that 'Truth is identity through synthesis'... as the subjective consciousness itself or the place where intuitions and concepts unite in synthesis" (Firestone 129). Tillich's "essential insight of transcendental reflection on reason and reality" allowed Kant's philosophy to overcome its epistemological boundaries within philosophy and grow into the theology that Tillich desired (Firestone 129). Tillich supersedes his predecessors because of his power to synthesize and mediate polarities.

The concept of Being-itself is central to Tillich's philosophical system, and thus a major missing piece from Kant's. As previously stated, Kant proffered a more extreme criticism on the limits of human knowledge. In this regard, Tillich claims that "this not only made the question of human identity difficult to answer in any satisfactory way, but also made the question of God equally difficult" (Firestone 129). Thus, for Tillich, the development of Kant's philosophical system has only two outcomes: "it became either a stagnant and bifurcated system of philosophy in which religion is explained according to finite reason (as with the Neo-Kantians) or a dynamic and unfolding system leading to a concept of theology in which religion itself is understood to ground human nature" (Firestone 130). Tillich obviously pursued the latter option by positing God as Being-itself. The principle of identity that Tillich finds in Kant's philosophy is the key factor for elevating Kant's system to include Tillich's theological perspective. Tillich states:

"It is unfortunate that Kant often is interpreted only as an epistemological idealist and an ethical formalist – and consequently rejected. Kant is more than this. His doctrine of the categories is a doctrine of human finitude. His doctrine of the categorical imperative is a doctrine of the unconditional element in the depth of practical reason. His doctrine of the teleological principle in art and nature enlarges the concept of reason beyond its cognitive-technical sense towards what we have called "ontological reason"." (Firestone 133).

For Tillich, "Kant's philosophy both establishes the bounds of reason's finitude and points the way forward to a more theologically sensitive understanding of reason" (Firestone 133). In this view, Tillich is embracing the partiality of human cognition and comprehension, which is how he justifies the need for symbolic language. Additionally, Tillich sees that "The categories of experience are categories of finitude. They do not enable human reason to grasp reality in-itself; but they do enable man to grasp his world, the totality of phenomena which appear to his experience and constitute his actions" (Firestone 133). Rather than simply acknowledging the gap between the world as one experiences it and the unconditional itself, Tillich seeks to create a link between the two to facilitate understanding of Being. Tillich termed Kant's finite categories of reason 'technical reason'; this technical reason limits Kantian philosophy in a way that Tillich's "ontological reason" does not.

In *Systematic Theology*, Tillich posits four “fields” of ontological reason: the cognitive, the aesthetic, the organizational (or technical-political-legal) and the organic (or communal-social). Furthermore, these fields of objective reason function as such that we recognize them in our objective world, that is, “the world of human affairs that engages us because it makes livable sense—or is “rational” (James 33). For Tillich, subjective reason corresponds to objective reason such that “whereas objective reason is “out there” giving intelligible structure to the world, subjective reason is “in us” and in our actions. Subjective reason is the way in which we, as perceiving subjects, “grasp” reality; and subjective reason is also the way we, as acting persons, outwardly “shape” reality” (James 34). Thus, for Tillich, we construct our objective world in the sense that it can be rationally grasped. Additionally, our “subjective reason in us grasps and shapes according to the objective reason that gives structure to the world and lets it makes sense” (James 36). In regard to subjective knowledge, “we grasp our world more or less according to what is true and meaningful; and we shape that world more or less according to what is right and wholesome. Or, stating this in an inverse way, our world is always more or less irrational” (James 36). In this binary, religious knowledge is subjective as it is grasped meaningfully.

Methodology: The Method of Correlation

Although Tillich interacts with various philosophers, such as Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Schleiermacher, as well as heavily borrowing from Heidegger and expanding off of Kant, he nevertheless proffers a unique interdisciplinary approach to the philosophy of religious epistemology through his method of correlation. His dialectical method consists of existential questions that are correlated to theological answers and Christian symbols through his demarcation of “Being” and “being”, such that his ontological approach allows philosophy and theology to work cohesively. Tillich borrows from Heidegger’s ontology in order to ground his argument that faith is more than a mere religious response. Conclusively, Tillich rejects the idea of the paradox in favor of his method of

correlation as a way of preserving the presence of philosophy within his systematic theology, and furthermore, Tillich acknowledges the authoritative gap between philosophy and theology as distinct disciplines despite their overlapping concerns. In this way, Tillich's faith and philosophical reasoning cannot be so easily assigned a causality, as he assigns them mutually reinforcing roles within his method of correlation. Whereas Kant desperately seeks to preserve God rationally through his moral philosophy, Tillich's philosophical position seeks an unbiased balance and coherence between his dual role as a theologian and philosopher.

Therefore, in regard to this epistemological debate, philosophical pursuits, which is ultimately what Tillich's method of correlation categorically falls into, are primarily a question of method, in which there are three major concerns: the object, the truth limits, and the link to the practical sphere. Thus, within this analysis of methodology, it is essential, "first, to determine what is the specific object of the concept of religion" (Mancini 66). For Tillich, theology and philosophy share the same object, or "logos", which "is an existential concept that implies the relationship of humanity to that which determines its very being and the possibility of not-being, life and death" (O'Neill 38). Tillich also employs the phrase "ultimate concern" as the logos, which he defines as "that which asserts the meaninglessness of life, and that which determines the elements being and non-being in both an ideal and real sense" (O'Neill 38). Tillich's philosophy of religion proposes that religions are merely symbolic systems that have been culturally constructed. For Tillich, "Even a theology that firmly roots itself in scripture and in a doctrine of revelation is subject to the conflicts of human thought and the ambiguities of history" (O'Neill 17). Thus, his theology is not rooted in doctrine, but rather, he proffers a philosophical system that is ontologically founded, utilizing the terms "Being" and "being" to illustrate his points. This ontological terminology is based in Heidegger's concept of Dasein, which is generally translated as "existence" to describe "being" as way in which one's self is engaged with the immediate world.

This type of consciousness, for Heidegger, is distinct from the mundane or everyday

“consciousness” in that “Being” entails a deeper and more critical understanding and interpretation of the world. He writes, "This entity which each of us is himself...we shall denote by the term “Dasein”" (Heidegger 27). Furthermore, he defines Dasein as “that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue" (Heidegger 68). In his view, Dasein does not mean the subject or the world itself, but rather an involved unity of Being-in-the-world. Similar to Tillich’s desired end for dialectical discovery, Heidegger’s Dasein is revealed as an ongoing engagement with the world that is mediated via the self. Thus, Tillich borrows Heidegger’s ontological foundation as a practical engagement with one’s environment to drive his existential inquiry as being an engaged and conceptually-aware conversation.

The importance of ontological reasoning is explicated by Tillich through his distinction between Being and being. He asserts the priority of the ontological approach by describing the two ways of approaching God: “the way of overcoming estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 251). In the way of overcoming estrangement, Tillich describes it such that “man discovers himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 251). In the second way of meeting a stranger, Tillich says, “a man meets a stranger when he meets God. The meeting is accidental” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 251). These two ways represent his view of the ontological and cosmological type of philosophy of religion, such that overcoming estrangement is the ontological.

Tillich states, “God is no object for us as subjects. He is always that which precedes this division. But, on the other hand, we speak about Him and we act up on Him, and we cannot avoid it, because everything which becomes real to us enters the subject-object correlation” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 260). Most importantly, it is “out of this paradoxical situation the half-blasphemous and mythological concept of the “existence of God” has arisen” (Hick, *Classical and*

Contemporary Readings 260). For Tillich, our greatest fault is that we, as religious believers, mistake our symbolic systems of God, the unconditioned, for the actual unconditional, which is really our Being. Tillich argues that knowledge of God should not be an issue of concern, not necessarily because it transcends human faculty, but because it is not the ultimate priority. Tillich's idea of ultimate concern is very interesting, as it allows for the coexistence of vastly different theologies under the presupposition that we all participate in Being, which should be our first priority. Ideas of goodness and morality fall under Being, whereas pursuits of empirical truths, such as dogmatic doctrinally driven belief systems, are examples of misplaced prioritization of being over Being.

Thus, Tillich's method of correlation forges a third option between the binary of emotion and reason founded on his phenomenological ontology. Whereas Kant draws on the pragmatic on behalf of morality, Tillich uniquely employs the symbolic to express his phenomenological ontology. Tillich's ontology, which borrows the Heideggerian language of "Being", is the basis for which he generates existential questions. Heidegger's phenomenology, profiting Tillich's method of correlation, suggests human experience and even sentiment facilitate the illumination of one's understanding of nature. His necessitation of the Real or field of intelligibility uniquely interacts with Tillich's tiered understanding of Being as structuring the symbolic and literal, as both decipher between different modes of approaching experiences. Tillich's approach is systematic, but it pulls away from a system that is wholly constructed out of rational concepts and experiential data. Tillich posits that the answers to these existential questions, which are philosophically pursued, are actually theological. In this way, he is certainly not suggesting a priori answers that can be attained through reason, which for Mancini, is highly problematic; in the case of a Utopia of the philosophy of religion, this would necessitate "a deuteronomic knowledge, that is to say a knowledge which arises as a consequence of a 'divine a priori' in the logical and ontological sense. It is based more on the logic of recognition (hence the epistemological primacy of the hermeneutic) than on pure thought" (Mancini 65). Tillich avoids the two extreme pitfalls of pure reason and pure phenomenology by philosophically positing a

correlational role of symbolic revelation within religious and existential inquiry. In this way, symbolic language serves as a transcendental hermeneutic, such that one's understanding and expression of the ultimate concern is not limited to cognition.

In his theory, there must exist an inherent or innate awareness or capacity for awareness of Being. For Tillich, Being should be the ultimate concern, as this conceptualization facilitates universality. In contrast, religion is often wrongly occupied with being, which hinders the connection between humanity and the symbolic revelation. Furthermore, for Tillich, any religion that is not ontologically rooted lacks universality, and thus fosters dogma. The distinction between Being and being is important for Tillich's argument, as he claims that the ontological method is basic for every philosophy of religion to the extent that the cosmological method without an ontological foundation destructively affects the relationship between philosophy and religion. The relationship between philosophy and theology, or religion, is essential for Tillich and his method of correlation. For Tillich, existential worries can be pacified by establishing a secure connection between theology and philosophy, whereas religion as a result of pure argument or sentiment is artificial. Furthermore, Tillich holds that philosophy of religion can contribute to the reconciliation between religion and secular culture through the ontological approach. Tillich's three volume explication, *Systematic Theology*, "is devoted to demonstrating how the 'symbols' of Christianity provide answers to the questions that result from existence; and revelation's primary symbol is what Tillich calls the 'Christian logos', that is, Christ, the New Being. Yet, he also asserts that this concrete or revealed logos is the same as the universal logos of philosophy, and that revelation is not new information" (O'Neill 45). In this way, Tillich's logos is universal as the ultimate concern for both philosophers and theologians, but his symbolic theory of "answering" is rooted in Christianity, which is how his apologetic approach takes form. It can be asked, though, that if theology and philosophy share "the same object of investigation, what is the something more to which theology has access?" (O'Neill 45). To answer this, the second concern of the methodology in Tillich's philosophical pursuit must be

addressed, which is the difference in authoritative standards for truth between philosophy and theology.

For the second methodological concern of philosophical pursuits, it is necessary “to decide in what way and within what limits the truth of religion can be tested” (Mancini 66). For Tillich, the theological and philosophical standards for authority are not the same. Unlike theologians, philosophers are not bound to accept revelation as a sufficient form of attaining knowledge. It is out of this disparity that Tillich proffers the method of correlation, such that his philosophical concerns and theological propositions must not occupy separate spaces within his overall position. In this methodology, the truth of religion may be tested via philosophical coherence. This “testing” is a dialectical process. This means that Tillich is not transferring the authority of revelation within his religious beliefs over to his philosophical pursuits, but rather he is proffering a way of gaining understanding such that dogma and doctrine are replaced by his conceptualization of the symbolic. This approach is most appropriate, in Tillich’s perspective, because religious language cannot be literal. Furthermore, in this structure, Tillich focuses on ontological concerns and gaining understanding of theology, rather than “knowledge of God” as a divine power in existence. Theology and philosophy are both oriented by their ontological object, such that Being remains the ultimate concern.

Thus, as it seems that separating Tillich’s philosophy, religion and theology is an untenable task, the more appropriate method involves interrogating the influence of each on another. In this method, the “truth limits” of religion must be evaluated qualitatively, as is the standard for “soft” humanities, rather than through quantitative propositions, as is the case in “hard” sciences. Tillich describes an ontological awareness of the unconditional, which is not to be mistaken for intuition, experience, or knowledge because, like Kant, Tillich believes that the vision of God is not a human possibility, at least not spatio-temporally. The idea that these religious claims are not based in experienced observation is the foundation for his claim that religions are cultural constructions. Tillich

is describing a strictly ontological awareness, meaning that as human beings, we are innately aware of something greater than ourselves.

He explains, “Neither “The Unconditioned” nor “something unconditional” is meant as a being, not even the highest being, not even God” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 260). For Tillich, God is unconditioned, not the unconditional. By this, he means that “the word “God” is filled with the concrete symbols in which mankind has expressed its ultimate concern—its being grasped by something unconditional. And this “something” is not just a thing, but the power of being in which every being participates” (Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings* 260). Tillich is aware of the role of language and concepts as practical hermeneutical tools for experience and expression, while calling attention to the imperfect and incomplete nature of this constructed system. This is the differentiation between Being, the unconditional, and being, the conditioned. Tillich says that we all participate, through our immediate ontological awareness, in Being, which is not God or religion. The conditioned, or being, is one’s God or religion, such that they are actually just representations of the unconditional. Tillich argues that God, as Being-itself, stands for that which is our ultimate concern, and since the ultimate concern is universal and all-encompassing, there no longer exists a separation between the sacred and secular domains. Furthermore, in Tillich’s view, literal or theoretically grounded language is incapable of fully conceptualizing the ultimate concern, due to the limited nature of human reason and cognition. Thus, he posits the symbolic theory in order to explain the way in which humans are capable of revelation.

Hermeneutics of the Symbolic: A Dialectical Discovery

Tillich emigrated to the United States at age 47, which is when his theological productions peaked. Although some have misunderstood the method of correlation, Andrew O’Neill expertly explicates Tillich’s entire philosophical system in his reader’s guide, *Tillich: A Guide for the Perplexed*. He explains that “The interwar and post-war periods are, for Tillich, dominated by the twin

problems of relativism and a sense of meaninglessness. This provokes his ‘apologetic’ approach, which demonstrates how Christian theology responds to existential problems” (O’Neill 2). In this way, Christianity is a mode of being that, in his view, is most coherent with Being; Christianity is not necessitated nor is it the ultimate concern, but it provides a superior set of symbolic theory. Throughout Tillich’s work, “the concepts of being and non-being, and essence and existence, continued to dominate his theological expression” (O’Neill 2). This acknowledgement is especially relevant in regards to Tillich’s use of the ontological as a foundation for his Christian existential inquiry, as he draws and departs from so many other prevalent philosophical positions, primarily Heidegger’s concept of “Being”, although Tillich argues that God is “Being-Itself”. His method of correlation is not a finished system but rather a dialectical approach to theology; his questions are existential but he posits theological answers.

For Tillich, everything is philosophically rooted in, and all questions trace back to, his conception of Being; “In the Systematic Theology, then, dialectic describes both the polarized conflict of imbalanced being and non-being in existence, and the triadic process of reconciling finitude, estrangement and ambiguity, or ‘salvation’” (O’Neill 32). For Tillich, philosophy and theology serve different purposes, but through his method of correlation, both are inherently incomplete or incapable of producing existential “answers” without the aid of the other, and even further, the answers to these existential questions cannot be formulated outside of the symbolic. In his method of correlation, the disciplines of theology and philosophy are mutually involved in the process of asking existential questions and positing answers, such that the philosophical inquiry, although driven by existential worry, is ameliorated by the theological employment of the symbolic. Lastly, these symbolic “answers” are “grasped” such that they are revealed through dialectic, which preserves their malleability in regard to the ever-changing current situation.

In *Tillich and World Religions: Encountering Other Faiths Today*, Robison B. James writes “Tillich believes the answers provided by all religions to these existential questions come in symbolic

terms. Thus his method, in a nutshell, is his interpreting what these answers mean by correlating certain existential questions with certain religious symbols” (James 14). Use of the symbolic is necessary because “we are aware that these two things are bigger, and that more is involved, than we can grasp in literal, exact terms. That is, the Kingdom of God and Eternal Life are symbolic. And that means they are more real, not less real, than the literal understandings we may have about what is involved” (James 15). For example, as mentioned above, in contrast to the historical biblical Christ, “we sooner or later realize that there is more to Jesus as Christ and Savior than flesh and blood can figure out. That is, “Jesus as the Christ” is symbolic, powerfully and transformingly so. Its significance has to be revealed by Jesus’ “Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17)” (James 15). For Tillich, the symbol serves to function as an expression of the nonmaterial. The symbol’s function as a reference point is necessary because that to which it points is not itself available to human cognition. In this regard, symbols cannot be substituted by a more explicit or literal language. Tillich posits his symbolic theory “because the ‘purity of reason’, or the ‘depth’ of human cognition, is fallen, humanity can only refer to truth symbolically because in its fallen state, the human experience of truth is finite and limited” (O’Neill 21-22). Thus, all religious language must occupy the symbolic realm, and because doctrine is assumedly dogmatic, Tillich proffers dialectic as the medium for meaning-making and mediating the personal experiences and universal awareness.

Language is a significant factor for Tillich. He “describes language as the medium of self-creation, which is the second function of life under the dimension of the Spirit” (O’Neill 25). In this way, one constructs and expresses his or her experiences through the use of language; “the symbol, however, is the medium of self-transcendence, mediating between the divine and the human. This suggests that the symbol, as participation in the revelation of being-itself, is the bearer of something more than language can be” (O’Neill 25). Additionally, his claim that “God is being-itself” reflects the necessity of the ontological approach to philosophy of religion. For Tillich, the relationship between God and humans, “between essential human nature and existence, is conceptually achieved through the

polarity of being and non-being. In essence, these are balanced; in existence, they are not” (O’Neill 23). As mentioned formerly, because of this inherent nature, we can experience revelation, even though we cannot fully conceptualize it.

In his system, “we do not have a clear conceptual grasp of God as being-itself and cannot, therefore, make literal statements about it. We do, however, have an ontological awareness of God as being-itself and an experience of revelation ‘grasping’ the human mind, which we express in theological statements, or symbols” (O’Neill 23). The symbol is uniquely “adequate and necessary”, whereas a metaphor is merely descriptive without invoking participation. In the final volume of the *Systematic Theology*, Tillich describes life in terms of three distinct processes: “In self-integration, the centre of the subject’s awareness, critique and alteration is itself. In self-creation, new centres are created and the individual is understood as a social being. In self-transcendence, the individual and the community are understood in relation to the inexhaustible source of meaning: God” (O’Neill 25). The progression from self-creation to self-transcendence demands the engagement of symbolic language, as literal language limits one’s expression and understanding to the bounds of human cognition. Thus, through the inherent ontological awareness and the dialectical method of correlation, Tillich proffers that the individual can gain understanding of the ultimate concern.

Tillich employs the symbol since “we cannot grasp the transcendent. It must grasp us. But it must do so through things we can grasp, that is, through things within our world” (James 40). Religious symbols are “persons, things, and events within our world through which we are “gotten at” by the saving, reconciling action” (James 40). In his philosophy, reconciliation with the transcendent is symbolic and nonrational, which is notably different in nature than “irrational”. Whereas nonrational expresses an inability to be categorized, irrational implies the lack of coherent reason, which would be problematic. For Tillich, “The language of symbol, then, is not a less fulsome or less faithful alternative to ‘a metaphysical account of the inner life of a divine being’. All words and concepts that refer to God, and thereby the persons of the Trinity, are ultimately symbolic because none of them can

exhaustively describe their referents” (O’Neill 23). Theologians “must employ symbols because, ‘on the one hand theology has a meditative task, to experience the power of the symbols; on the other a discursive function to analyze and describe the form in which the substance can be grasped’” (O’Neill 23). Tillich’s symbolic theory prevents the subject of theology from being bound in the same way as theology itself is as a result of the human limitations of reason and conceptual thinking.

Not only do symbols convey “that which is otherwise inexpressible”, but also they participate in the reality they symbolize (O’Neill 23). The most important function of the symbol though is that it “allows the Christian to, for example, ‘[participate] in the New Being as it is manifest in Jesus the Christ’.” (O’Neill 23). Thus, Tillich writes, “The function of the religious symbol is to mediate between being-itself and man’s concern with the concrete, to make present being-itself in a thinkable, finite object, to which one can relate and about which one can be concerned” (O’Neill 23-24). This means that “Symbolic statements about God, like ‘Christ’ and ‘Spirit’, are symbolic not only because they point to or reveal the infinite, but also because they have the ability to change and still reveal the infinite” (O’Neill 26). The religious symbol is therefore unique in that it is “expressive ‘of that which is symbolized but also that through which it symbolized’”; “In this concept, Tillich argues that the unconditioned towards whom a symbol points gives the symbol power, but as a finite symbol of kairos the symbol is also subject to change” (O’Neill 19). The key to understanding the “truth value” of Tillich’s symbolic system is that “the symbols of faith are understood to be finite and conditioned symbols which have the power to reveal unconditioned meaning” (O’Neill 19). In order for revelation to be within human capacity, however, God must be understood as Being-itself. By ontologically establishing humanity in the unconditioned, Tillich is likewise establishing the primacy of Being-itself. The inherent ontological awareness is the unconditional, whereas God is unconditioned; that which is symbolically “grasped at” is God as Being-itself, which transcends the word or concrete concept of “God” as a constructed and existent being.

The only non-symbolic (and logical) statement is that “God is being-itself”. This reality grounds the possibility that other things exist and in their existence they refer to God. “God” itself, however, is symbolic as a first order religious statement, whereas “being-itself” is non-symbolic as a first order ontological statement. Thus, together they form a second order theological reflection that is literal but correlates the symbolic statement with the non-symbolic statement. In this view, religious assertions are symbolic, ontological assertions are literal, and theological assertions are literal descriptions of the correlation between the religious symbols and the ontological concepts. Tillich argues that “no theologian can say anything literal about God because to do so is to delimit God by the human incapacity for understanding” (O’Neill 22). Symbols are needed to “express what is unconditioned because it cannot be fully grasped by conditioned forms. Consequently, the symbol cannot be further reduced or compared to that which it represents, nor can that to which it refers be grasped by some other means” (O’Neill 22). Tillich’s symbolic theory is deeply theological in nature because it “implies that everything that is said about God is symbolic because it points towards God, who is the ground and structure of being” (O’Neill 22). In this general understanding though, Tillich manages to maintain a distinct level of universality and freedom from religious doctrine or dogma. Although Tillich himself posits Christian symbols, his method remains comprehensible even without Christianity.

The necessary implementation of the symbolic arises out of the human incapacity to wholly conceptualize the religious and divine. Due to the limitations of human reason, it is essential to recognize that “participation in cognition and existence involves a tension between categorization, and the sublimation of categories. A concept is only helpful insofar as it allows the thinking subject both to understand and to critique” (O’Neill 30). Thus, to compensate for this shortcoming, Tillich necessitates “a dialectical relationship between theological and philosophical concepts, between traditional and contemporary visions of the Church, and between religious themes and their myriad cultural expressions” (O’Neill 30). Through his dialectical approach, Tillich admits an awareness of an

inability to succinctly conceptualize existence, which is also tied to “the inability of attaining serenity, security, and perfection” (O’Neill 30). Thus, his systematic approach must leave Tillich the appropriate space to create a flexible philosophical method of correlation, such that the “answers” may adapt to the ever-changing situation. Through a stable ontological structure, Tillich is able to adopt a more flexible form of “knowledge” or understanding to address notions of truth, authority and revelation, as they relate to existence. With the dialectical approach, “the ‘message’ of revelation ‘grasps’ the individual and spiritual community in such a way that the ‘situation’ of existence and history are gradually redeemed from conflict and ambiguity” (O’Neill 32). In this way, the inquiry is meant to be understood as an ongoing conversation, rather than a scripted structure.

In this regard, the use of literal language implies a theoretical comprehension of the symbolic, which demotes religious symbols from a revelation of ultimate concern to the realm of the scientific or objective, and would thus strip religion of its personal hermeneutic value. To demote religious language to the literal level would mean only encountering religion at the first level of knowing, which is distant and objective. By incorporating the symbolic, Tillich is able to encounter religion at the deepest level of participation. Thus, religious language must remain symbolic in order to preserve Tillich’s conceptualization of God as Being-itself. Additionally, this structuring perpetuates the need for a personal engagement with God. As noted previously, Tillich is a theologian of culture who advocates for the all-encompassing nature of the ultimate concern, such that there is no separate secular realm. In regards to this pervasiveness, there is a circularity, as hinted previously, in regards to Tillich’s Christian symbolic theory. The theological circle, as defined by Tillich, refers to the idea that:

“theologians are bound within a covenant of faith to study, interpret and spread the Christian kerygma, the unchangeable truth or ‘message’ of Christ. This message is communicated through the source of scripture, mediated by experience and attested to under the norm of baptismal confession. Though it is not irrational, theology’s transmission of this message is constrained by particular historical and cultural contexts, what Tillich calls the human ‘situation’. Thus, theology must responsibly transmit the eternal truth of the Christian Gospel and attend to the changing demands of the situation in and to which it is transmitted” (O’Neill 37).

In this light, Tillich must fulfill his duty, such that he perpetuates his Christian message. This would seem to suggest that his philosophical inquiry should or could not be taken outside of the Christian framework. In this regard, Tillich's philosophical system is teetering on the boundary between what constitutes an apologetic philosophy of religion and what could accurately be deemed only as Christian theology.

Demythologizing the Divine Narrative

In relation to the issue of the theological circle is the third and final concern within the methodology of a philosophy of religion, such that "since religion is a doctrine of salvation and therefore lasts as long as there is something in distress which needs saving, its link with the practical must be established and it must be compared with other great hypotheses of liberation" (Mancini 66). The essentiality of the role of the practical in philosophy of religion is the sole link for Kant, by way of morality. He posits that religion should be "successively freed from all statutes based on history, and one purely moral religion rule over all, in order that God might be in all" (Hillebrand 208). Kant continuously maintains his high valuation of a morally derived belief system, arguing that the "predisposition to moral religion lay hidden in human reason long before popular faith" (Kant 120). He further explicates these views in his claim, "Now human art and wisdom cannot climb up to heaven to ascertain for itself the credentials of the mission of the first teacher but must be satisfied with signs which, the content apart, can yet be gathered from the way the faith was introduced" (Kant 120). This pursuit thus becomes tracing historicity and doing scholarship though, which is not akin to philosophy of religion. He continues, "Hence scriptural scholarship is required to preserve the authority of a church based on Holy Scripture, though not that of a religion (for to have universality a religion must always be based on reason)" (Kant 120). To this point, Tillich would argue against Kant's claim that those who do the will of God, not those who call his name, those "who seek to become well-pleasing to him, not through loud praises of him (or of his envoy, as a being of divine origin) according to

revealed concepts which not every human being can have, but through a good life conduct, regarding which everyone knows his will – these will be the ones who offer to him the true veneration that he desires” (Kant 114). In Kant’s approach, one’s faith is more akin hope in moral justice rather than a direct relationship with a personal God. It is through this focus on morality that allows Kant to approach religion in what he terms practical rationality. In this regard, Kaufmann argues that “Kant, whose God is similar to that of Judaism and Christianity, does not succeed in showing that reason demands his existence” (Kaufmann 168). In this way, Kant is unlike Tillich, as he is more severe in his philosophical critique, explicitly denying the possibility of proving the existence of God indubitably through philosophical argument. Although Tillich does not posit God as the ultimate concern, he does use God as Being-itself to call for the necessary participation in Being, which goes beyond mere adherence to moral codes.

Whereas Kant makes room for a generic religion in philosophy pragmatically through morality, stating “The veil must fall. The leading-string of sacred tradition with all its appendices becomes by degrees useless, and at last a fetter,” Tillich seeks a more systematic approach to philosophically uphold his own Christianity through the link to the practical sphere (Hillebrand 208). Tillich proffers his choice of Christianity through an “argument that the Christian message has the “strongest” credentials for becoming the universal faith of humankind— “strongest” in the sense that the symbolic core of the Christian message has the least imperialistic and most self-surrendering thrust of any religion that offers salvation through and within our historical experience” (James ix). Philosophy is the medium through which Tillich can present his theology; “Theology is responsible for both the questions and answers of existence, while philosophy is relegated to a group including many other disciplines whose contribution theology organizes” (O’Neill 43). Although Tillich thus far has been analyzed in light of other major philosophers, he must also be acknowledged in his principal theologian role, especially with regard to the primacy of the role of theological answers to his existential questions.

In this light, Rudolf Bultmann serves as a useful comparative measure for the relative role of biblical hermeneutics within an apologetic philosophical system. Bultmann and Tillich have very different theological aims. Whereas “Tillich was above all a theologian of culture, seeking to interpret the symbols with which people address the object of their ultimate concern; Bultmann earned his formidable reputation as a Bible scholar with a command of the history of religions and a facility with all available critical methods” (Sanders). In their theological roles, however, Bultmann and Tillich both took advantage of the fluidity of theology amongst other humanities’ fields. Although “Tillich was actually a kind of continental philosopher who believed himself to be a theologian... Bultmann was actually a systematic theologian with a definite, Heideggerian account of saving faith to proclaim, though he thought he was a historical theologian doing objectively descriptive work” (Sanders). In both, Heidegger’s philosophy plays an influential role.

Additionally, Bultmann and Tillich’s perspectives on the role of historical truth and existential inquiry are similar: “There is one meaningful place where their work overlaps: In the absence of Jesus and the presence of Christ. Both of them taught that the actual man Jesus Christ was an artifact of bygone history, with nothing to offer to faith” (Sanders). This is not to say that either man disregarded Christianity, but rather “that the whole point of Christianity was an existential encounter with the spiritual presence of Christ in the here and now” (Sanders). For Tillich, the role of the theologian always concerned the current situation of mankind. Tillich sought to separate faith from historical narrative in order “to protect saving faith from the dangers of history” (Sanders). According to a co-worker of his, Langdon Gilkey, Tillich often stated, “I do not wish the telephone in my office to ring and to hear from some New Testament colleague: ‘Paulus, our research has now finally removed the object of your ultimate concern; we cannot find your Jesus anywhere’” (Sanders). Out of this concern, Tillich employs the descriptors being and Being, such that there is a possibility of “a gospel that could survive the non-existence of the historical Jesus, or even the discovery of his still-dead bones” (Sanders). In this way, Tillich’s method of correlation is much more philosophical in nature than

Bultmann's blatant theology, regardless of any biased or personal motive behind Tillich's inquiry.

Thus, for Tillich, "Christ, which he described as "the New Being," appears to us principally not in Jesus himself, but in the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ" (Sanders). Although Bultmann demythologizes the New Testament somewhat differently, and employs different language to separate the historical Christ from the Christ symbol, he agrees that "the most important thing, though, is JC3, the contemporary proclamation of the message about salvation through Jesus. When you hear JC3, you have it all, as you are called out by the wholly other into a field of existential decision: saved" (Sanders). Bultmann posits JC2 as the historical Christ, and argues, that "There really was a JC2 back in the day, but to look behind the word of JC3 for something like a JC2 who still matters today would be to try to keep knowing Christ "according to the flesh" rather than "according to the Spirit" (Sanders). Bultmann's JC2 and JC3 are comparable to Tillich's use of the symbolic as flexible to the situation. Their respective demythologizations of biblical narrative as historical doctrine are distinctly motivated by their own personal desires, though, such that Bultmann wants to preserve the Christian ideal of salvation, while Tillich seeks a more universal hope in his symbolic theory.

Tillich's theological philosophy addresses the ultimate concern and questions of Being, as well as explicating why the symbols of the Christian faith are most appropriate for "answering". Additionally, as a theologian of culture, and a believer in the overlap between the sacred and the profane via cultural expressions, Tillich's theology must account for the dogmatic nature of doctrine in relation to the changing human situation. His religious existentialism is all-encompassing in that he not only "always wrote with the contemporary cultural situation in mind", which accounts for how his interpretation of "the message of revelation for the human situation" changed over time since correlation is experientially grounded, but also "his interest in a correlational theology arises out of an interest to prevent the bifurcation of religion and culture in general, though not necessarily to equate the two" (O'Neill 28). Through his method of correlation, Tillich seeks to mediate religion and culture as separate institutions through their relationship to the current situation, such that the sacred and

profane binary is blurred by an all-encompassing awareness of the ultimate concern.

The Therapeutic and Theoretical Purpose of the Theological Circle

Additionally, Tillich advocates that “the analysis of the human situation employs materials made available by man’s creative self-interpretation in all realms of culture. Philosophy contributes, but so do poetry, drama, the novel, therapeutic psychology, and sociology. The theologian organizes these materials in relation to the answer given by the Christian message” (O’Neill 23). In this view, is philosophy merely “man’s creative self-interpretation”? And if so, what does that entail for philosophy as a discipline? In his resistance to rationalization, Tillich seems to be inadvertently demoting his own theological philosophy to a mere prayer of hope. In this way, his method of correlation is not really about answering existential questions in a systematically critical way, but rather a method of psychotherapy in which Tillich can reassure his own existential worries via theological thinking. Although Tillich believes that “Together, these principles describe the ways in which revelation simultaneously provides hope and courage, as well as the criteria for self-critical and dialectical reflection inside and outside the Church”, it seems that he may only be successful in relation to the hopeful nature of revelation (O’Neill 3). In this light, Tillich may be stuck in the same place as Kant in regards to their inability to construct a philosophical space for faith.

Tillich confesses that “the distinction between theology and philosophy, however, is not necessarily their object, but what constitutes an authoritative account of their object” (O’Neill 44). He further explicates that “revelation does not contradict or supersede reason, but the theologian is committed to accepting revelation as authoritative while the philosopher is not” (O’Neill 44). In this regard, is Tillich’s method of correlation more so an act of philosophy or theology? Can it be both? O’Neill argues that “even if theology and philosophy are merely given different names to the same thing when they discuss the logos, Tillich’s concept of ‘ultimate concern’ clearly suggests that theology has a claim to something more. As a result, philosophy becomes a handmaid to theology”

(O'Neill 45). To this, Hick proffers that by recognizing "ultimate reality as variously humanly conceived, and thus variously humanly experienced, and hence variously humanly responded to in historical forms of life", one is then able to generalize ultimate concern as non-Christian. Furthermore, Hick proffers that this "recognition of variety in our human response to the Transcendent depends upon the epistemological principle propounded by St Thomas, 'Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower', and developed in the modern world by Kant in a way that has affected nearly all western philosophy since" (Hick 27). This epistemological principle verges on solipsism, which inherently contradicts the universality of the ultimate concern.

Thus, Tillich posits his own structure of "knowing", which are the three levels mentioned at the outset of this analysis. The shallowest level is that of "controlling knowledge", such that the knowing subject is separated greatly from its object in a highly detached and objective kind of knowledge such as in empirical sciences. This level entails minimal participation of the subject in the object. The middle level is the balance between participating in the object and separating from that object to grasp it conceptually; by this Tillich means that "this middle level is the level at which we "understand." It is the depth in which we understand and interpret the manifold expressions of the human spirit, in the arts, in scientific projects, in mastering and using a language, in social movements, in political causes, and in other humane spheres" (James 58). The final level, which is the deepest way of knowing and participating, entails an awareness "of things with which our lives are so totally wrapped up that we are grasped, through these things and along with these things, at a depth beyond that at which any encountered realities stand opposite us as objects" (James 58). Most notably, this is the level of existential knowledge, which encompasses religious knowledge. In this form of knowing we have "our awareness of values, causes, imperatives, and realities that shape and determine who and what we are in our deepest selves" (James 58). Participation in the object at this level is so engrossing and "so overwhelming that the predominantly separative-objectifying moments are weaker, less intense, and less marked" (James 59). These objectifying moments, however, are there. The objects of

our distinctly religious consciousness, such as Jesus Christ for Christians, are religious symbols. Thus, Tillich cannot step back from his personal encounter with religion. In this way, his participation in the theological circle serves as a testament to the genuineness of his philosophical system; Tillich is not only theorizing about participation in Being; he is also participating. As Tillich encounters religion, and therefore his philosophy of religion, at least partially at this deepest level, it becomes difficult to analyze and critique his philosophy at a shallower level.

It is precisely through this tiered structure of knowing that Tillich is able to construct his method of correlation, as it incorporates multiple levels of engagement. His method of correlation is multifaceted as it calls for interaction between different fields of thought within several “boundary situations”. His dialectical approach to revelation in relation to human experience or “situation” posits his systematic method of correlation as a way to generate answers to existential questions through theological content. His philosophy of religion is determined by not only an awareness of religious reality but also by the limitations of the philosophical concept. Additionally, he values the way in which the discipline of theology is shaped by the methods of philosophical self-critique, since theology is a rational discipline that depends on philosophical concepts. Tillich advocates:

“The task of a theological treatment of the traditional arguments for the existence of God is twofold: to develop the question of God which they express and to expose the impotency of the ‘argument’, their inability to answer the question of God. These arguments bring the ontological analysis to a conclusion by disclosing that the question of God is implied in the finite structure of being. In performing this function, they partially accept and also partially reject traditional natural theology, and they drive reason to the quest for revelation” (Tillich *ST* I 210).

Thus, for Tillich, theology must make space for revelation within the human quest for understanding, while also maintaining the divine nature of revelation as transcending pure reason. Elevating either human experience or reasoned argumentation results in the detrimental demoting or complete exclusion of revelation, which is necessary for Tillich’s symbolic theory of dialectical discovery and “answering”. It is precisely “in and through these symbolic realities, the transcendent gets at us—the transcendent that, at least for Western religions, is God” (James 60). Due to the human incapacity to

directly grasp and objectify the ultimate ground of our being, we need it to “grasp us”. In Tillich’s view, “it is always grasping, sustaining, and constraining us, though we are usually not conscious that we are being grasped in this way. Because it grasps us from beyond the objective world that we finite subjects grasp and shape and help to construct, we can say—in a Tillichian phrase—that it grasps us “at a level beyond the subject-object opposition” (James 60). This boundary between the subject and object is one of many that Tillich seeks to deconstruct in his philosophical system.

For Tillich, the human condition is capable of revelation, but revelation is still transcendent; “It ‘grasps’ the human individual and community – we do not ‘grasp’, or finally understand, revelation” (O’Neill 5). His theology considers the “unmediated universality of revelation together with the mediated experience of revelation” (O’Neill 11). Thus, “If the salvation of all humanity and history is the telos revealed by God, the ‘power of being-itself’, then all of history, culture, religion and existence are affected by and included in that promise. Ultimately, revelation is meaningful for humanity because human ‘being’ shares in the power of ‘being-itself’” (O’Neill 5). Revelation must be grounded in experience to avoid abstraction that diminishes the depth of religion and destroys it. Additionally, the role of self-criticism is essential to avoiding dogma, idolatry and ignoring cultural influences. Tillich’s awareness of shortcomings and presuppositions elevates his philosophy beyond the theoretical, as he attempts to ameliorate these inherent issues through his prioritization of Being and fostering a symbolic link outside of institutionalized religion.

Conclusions

As raised previously, “religion” encompasses many meanings, including non-theistic belief systems, which raises the question of how Tillich posits Christianity as the “religion” in his philosophical system. In relation to this concern, one may wonder if Tillich really is “doing” philosophy of religion, or if he is actually only operating in the role of an apologetic theologian, limiting himself to the presupposed paradigms of Christianity. In this latter concern, although Tillich

does claim to uniquely use philosophy and theology as counterparts in his inquiry, the presence of his faith undeniably raises concerns regarding a certain degree of bias. To this extent, although Tillich does frame his theological responses within a Christian symbolic theory, making use of God, Christ, the Spirit, and the Trinity, “his concern to reflect on and revise contemporary theology means that Tillich cannot be placed immediately within any particular tradition of interpreting these doctrines. In fact, the notion of ‘doctrine’ itself is frequently replaced with ‘symbol’, or ‘concept’, in order to afford him greater latitude of description” (O’Neill 2). Tillich’s prominent use of philosophical appeals, rather than theological doctrines or dogma, is a testament to his desire for a universal and unbiased philosophy of religion. Utilizing Tillich’s proposed philosophy that all institutionalized religions are simply symbolic structures that have formed as a result of culture over time, and that these symbolic structures are merely representations, rather than the ultimate concern, one can develop a more universally appealing philosophy of religion. Although Tillich’s philosophy, and perhaps all of the aforementioned philosophies of religion, have not yet succinctly defined the truth of religious knowledge in satisfactory manner, it seems that from them, we are nonetheless able to learn. In regards to attaining religious knowledge in its truest form, we have learned the undisputed importance of innate consciousness, practicality and universality.

His ontological approach centers on the inherent connection between God, as Being-itself, and the human situation and experience or expression of Being. Out of this existential worry, Tillich demythologizes the historical or biblical narrative of that connection while also preserving the symbolic function for his own faith. There are several key Tillichian terms: theonomy, the protestant principle and the concept of the symbol. For Tillich, “...theonomy expresses the reunion of the structural laws of reason with their inexhaustible ground, or ‘depth’. God is the law for both the structure and the ground of reason, thus reason and depth are properly united in God” (O’Neill 13). In this way, the nature of Tillich’s God is not altogether different than the way in which Kant characterizes moral reasoning as structurally rooted in a divine power. Tillich furthers his position,

though, to argue that “What is united in God, however, is incomplete under the conditions of existence. Even a religion living according to divine law and making every effort to secure the freedom of reason is limited, finite, disrupted and incomplete” (O’Neill 13). Thus, for Tillich, theonomy can not be adequately ascribed to any singular religion or culture, but rather, should be thought of as “the free and original ground out of which they arise” (O’Neill 13). In this definition, the Christ symbol is central to his personal principle of theonomy, as he posits Christianity as the most coherent symbolic theory for universal appeal and personal salvation. Tillich does not want to rationalize theology or replace the content of theology with reason, however, because although philosophy facilitates posing ontological and existential questions, theological content is nevertheless necessary to answer those questions. Furthermore, Tillich wants to preserve the necessary space for his method of correlation to adapt to changing situations in relation to the sacred. As discussed in relation to Bultmann previously, Tillich is primarily a theologian of culture; “He responds that Protestantism in the twentieth century can only survive if it continues to evaluate its symbols and objectives, deny the cleavage between sacred and profane spheres, and protest prophetically against man’s attempts to give absolute validity to his own thinking and acting” (O’Neill 18). As the Christian symbol embodies his own theological response to the existential system, rather than a rational argument for the existence of God as a being, Tillich is indeed doing theological philosophy.

Mancini concludes that in the end, “There are therefore two main questions for a philosophy of religion: its truth and its efficacy, its value and its use. Because of the necessary link between theory and practice these two questions are one and mean the same thing” (Mancini 66). Tillich’s dialectical approach to religious knowledge as philosophically rooted in an ontological structure of Being proffers the most efficient methodology that retains the capacity for truth elements. Mancini continues, “However, the final justification is not theoretical but practical, not the vision but the capacity to liberate. Kant was right when he said that in religion ‘everything depends on the doing’.” (Mancini 66). In this way, Mancini is mistaken, as Tillich does indeed surpass Kant, most notably in regard to

his practical utilization of the symbolic. Although the defense of an objective religious symbol may never be possible, let alone adequate, Tillich's dialectical method proffers the most thorough approach to expanding the epistemological boundaries of religious "knowledge" and ontological understanding by linking the theoretical and practical spheres in a personally appealing and universally applicable manner.

Additionally, as objectivity seeks to be impartiality and detachment as its ultimate concern, it inherently undermines Tillich's necessity of a personal engagement and participation in Being. Thus, it seems that to seek objectivity in the realm of religious language and/or to constitute "knowledge" as a sort of empirical pursuit of epistemological gain would be a sacrilegious disservice to both philosophies of religion and theology. For these disciplines, the hermeneutic value outweighs the technicality of argumentation. Additionally, although Tillich himself may be a victim of the "theological circle", his interdisciplinary approach is well-suited for the aim of theorizing theology; his delineation of knowledge and encountering religion provides a stable framework for addressing the epistemology of religion, such that "faith" can be recognized as a unique form of knowledge in that it, like the humanities, is subject to critical evaluation rather than quantitative objectification. Although Tillich's symbolic theory assumes an apologetic Christianity, his ontological approach to "philosophy of religion" is pragmatic. Like Kant, Tillich seems to be aware of his own limitations, yet justifies this subjectivity as contrary to the "sacrilegious" nature of historically institutionalized religions. In this regard, his application of the symbol is appropriate for his aims, but his appropriation of Christ as the center of this system is much more rooted in theology than philosophy, which seems to suggest an inherent inability to escape the theological circle of Christianity.

Overall, Tillich succeeds in superseding his predecessors, especially Kant, through his ability to mediate oppositions and polarities. His capacity to synthesize intuitions and concepts through his engagement with subjective consciousness is a testament to his insight into the transcendental character of reflecting on reason and reality, especially as they relate to religious concerns. His

positioning of Being above being, such that “religion” the institution and God as an existent being are not the ultimate concern, eludes the epistemological concerns of a potential religious pluralism in favor for a universal participation in the ontological concept of Being. This participation is quintessentially captured in Tillich’s portrayal of the method of correlation as a dialectic; his characterization of dialectical discovery as an ongoing conversation overcomes the conflict that arises with the historicity of religious narratives as well as the current application of doctrine in institutionalized religions to justify dogmatic beliefs. Tillich successfully mediates the extremes of pure reason and pure phenomenology that his predecessors fell prey to; by employing cross-disciplinary approaches that share a common logos, Tillich is able to construct an all-encompassing philosophical method. Within his philosophical position, Christianity, as it is characterized as a revealed religion, serves as the best fit for symbolic “answering”. By maintaining the precedence of Being over any faith in a being, Tillich avoids accounting for issues of paradox. His method of correlation mediates theology and philosophy, reason and experience, the historical presence of past religious narrative and doctrine with the current human situation, and the necessary engagement of the personal and universal. His synthesis does stem from his subjective experiences and reflection, but his awareness of this influence affords him greater leverage as both a theologian and philosopher of religion. Tillich’s method of correlation can be theoretically and critically analyzed to produce a fruitful ontological understanding of experience and expression. Furthermore, although it is more difficult to critique his symbolic use of Christian hermeneutics, his desire to avoid dogma and maintain a critical eye towards indoctrinated narratives can nonetheless be appreciated. To this extent, Tillich has laid the groundwork for approaching philosophy of religion in way that engages with yet nonetheless surpasses previous philosophical positions.

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