



North American
Paul Tillich
Society

Bulletin

Volume XLVII, Number 1 and 2 Spring and Summer 2021
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Editor's note

At long last we come to the spring and summer issue of the NAPTS *Bulletin*. In this issue you will find some of the presentations from our meeting last fall as well as information about the upcoming meeting in San Antonio. As we work on transferring the role of secretary/treasurer from Fred Parrella to Lawrence Whitney and myself, please bear with us for the bumps in the road. We are working on a system for online/electronic dues. More information will be coming to you for that through the listserv. I should also note that I have been talking with a few of you about archive material for the Society. If you have things you would like to share with the society, we are working on determining the best place to house such an archive. Please contact me directly, vehret@mercyhurst.edu, if you have things you would like to share.

The Annual Meeting In the Year of the Ongoing Pandemic

The AAR is working to be mindful of the ongoing risks to its members from the pandemic. The NAPTS is following along with the guidelines and safety protocols provided by the AAR. As it currently stands, we will meet in person in San Antonio on Friday, November 19. Meeting rooms will be announced later, but this is the current program:

- 9-10:30, Tillich Fellows Panel
- 11-12:30 Book Panel *Why Tillich? Why Now?*
- 12:30-2 Lunch, Executive Committee Meeting
- 2-5 Panel "Technology, Politics, and Spirituality"
(There will be a short break)
- 5-6 Business Meeting

Due to the ongoing concerns of the pandemic, we have not scheduled a banquet and speaker this year. We encourage members to take time in breaks to get to know each other and invite new members to smaller lunch and dinner gatherings on your own where we can build community and mentoring relationships.

¹ My full argument about theology, ethics, and video games can be found in Benjamin J. Chicka, *Playing as Others: Theology and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, Forthcoming

Articles

Tillich, Pandemic, and Video Games

Benjamin J. Chicka

Introduction

One way to describe heteronomy is the destruction of autonomous creations by external force. It is on display when one group latches onto a polar tension in life and uses it as a weapon with which to bludgeon another group in an effort to define their shared situation as one in which the weapon wielders matter and are included while those being attacked do not, and can therefore be treated in heinous ways. When religious organizations make group membership and being an LGBTQ+ individual exclusive options, that polarization is an example of heteronomy. The tension between autonomy and heteronomy centers on whether any group under consideration is organized inclusively so that people can freely be themselves and flourish, or if freedom and fulfillment are only available for those in power and those who submit to their demands. Paul Tillich was keenly aware of how conflicts between heteronomy and autonomy impact daily life. He spent his formative years as a chaplain in the trenches during World War I and produced his systematic theology in the wake of his home country's failings during World War II, after all.

Heteronomy is also a fitting label for Gamergate, an organized campaign of harassment against minority game developers, press members, and fans within the video game industry. For about the past six years, in the wake of Gamergate, I have been analyzing that industry and applying Tillich's philosophical theology to developments within it.¹ While my work on video games began with a heteronomous situation, theonomy is also a fitting label for developments in the industry after Gamergate. The concept of theonomy, "autonomous

(October 2021). A core piece of the argument applies Tillich's theology of culture to popular culture and video games.

reason united to its own depth,"² is directly related to Tillich's position that God is not a being with specific attributes and intentions, but the ground of being. God is the ground, the support, giving meaning to everything that exists. Whenever exclusive polarized options are experienced, theonomy indicates an inclusive participatory alternative is possible. Such an alternative is precisely what has happened in video games. Changes within the industry in the aftermath of Gamergate support Tillich's assertion that historical upheaval is often a new opportunity for theological depth to break through. Just as Tillich located hope for Christian socialism within the destruction of war, the violent disruptions created by Gamergate have made space for theonomous video games to break through. After describing Gamergate and providing examples of games supporting this claim that the industry has moved toward a theonomous situation, I will conclude by describing some ways such meaningful video games were uniquely equipped to navigate around problems posed by the historical upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic.

From Heteronomy to Theonomy in the Video Game Industry

Gamergate unfolded in 2014 when independent game developer Zoë Quinn released her game *Depression Quest*.³ It came out at a time when flashy

games akin to Summer blockbuster movies were the norm.⁴ *Depression Quest* was an experimental alternative that shared more in common with choose your own adventure books than such action-packed video games. Some video game fans took Quinn's game, and especially the press coverage it received for being an attempt to convey the experience of living with depression through the interactivity of video games,⁵ as a threat to what video games are "supposed" to be about. Gamergate is the movement such fans created by spreading lies about Quinn and other female game developers and industry critics who rallied to her support. The lies eventually resulted in death threats against the women. Gamergate created a culture war in which its supporters defended "real" games by attacking women and other minorities attempting to craft alternative types of games such as *Depression Quest*.⁶ However, rather than be silently pushed out of the industry as the sort of participants who are not allowed, those who were targeted by Gamergate have brought changes to the industry.

Just as Tillich prophetically critiqued dangerous cultural distortions, including and perhaps especially those of his home country, those attacked in the situation created by Gamergate have pushed back against video game culture.⁷ Their protestation created new opportunities in the video game

² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Reason and Revelation; Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 85.

³ For an accessible summary of what led to and resulted from Gamergate see Kyle Wagner, "The Future Of The Culture Wars Is Here, And It's Gamergate," *Deadspin*, October 14, 2014, <https://deadspin.com/the-future-of-the-culture-wars-is-here-and-its-gamergate-1646145844>.

⁴ For those concerned about the link between such violent action-packed video games and real-world violence, claims about such a causal link have been roundly debunked. See Andrew Fishman, "Blame Game: Violent Video Games Do Not Cause Violence," *Psychology Today*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/video-game-health/201907/blame-game-violent-video-games-do-not-cause-violence>; Jason Schreier, "Why Most Video Game 'Aggression' Studies Are Nonsense," *Kotaku*, August, 14, 2015, <https://kotaku.com/why-most-video-game-aggression-studies-are-nonsense-1724116744>.

⁵ Phil Owen, "4 Video Games That Help You Understand And Deal With Your Depression," *Kotaku*, April 19, 2013, <https://kotaku.com/4-video-games-that-help-you-understand-and-deal-with-yo-473476131>.

⁶ The angry reactions of Gamergate supporters to non-male and non-white characters in video games eerily resemble the rise of white nationalism across the world right now. For more on Tillich in relation to the latter see Eric A. Weed, *The Religion of White Supremacy in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

⁷ Their calls for radical changes needed in the industry echo Tillich's frank assessment of his fellow German colleagues and citizens falling under the sway of the Nazis: "We suddenly realized that if Hitler can be produced by German culture, something must be wrong with this culture.... If Hitler is the outcome of what we believed to be true philosophy and the only theology, both must be false." Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 163-164.

industry to affirm identities heteronomous forces in the real world do not always allow to be realized. The Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) is one of the largest gaming conventions in the United States and takes places in Boston, Seattle, and San Antonio every year. While each event involves a massive show floor where action games with huge budgets can be found, the areas showcasing independent game developers and experimental games have become larger and are now the reason many fans attend the conventions. Furthermore, in the face of pressure to respond to Gamergate, convention organizers introduced the Diversity Lounge in 2014 at PAX East in Boston. The initiative was initially criticized for placing minorities in a corner out of the spotlight, literally a separate room away from the main show floor,⁸ but the lounge has since developed into a safe space where attendees can support LGBTQ+ merchants, speak with professional ethicists about diversity, and generally learn more about issues faced by those who have been historically marginalized in the industry. At that same PAX East, the nonprofit organization Take This introduced the AFK Room (away from keyboard). These rooms are now present at all PAX events and are quiet mental health spaces for both convention attendees and staff.⁹ They are staffed by local volunteers and clinicians present to support anyone distressed and overwhelmed by the convention. As would happen in a theonomous culture, these structures were put in place to overcome the heteronomous damage caused by Gamergate. Failure and crisis were not only that, but also afforded an opportunity for new and better things to emerge. Just as Tillich was able to identify the creation of something new and

hopeful in the remnants of two World Wars, the violent disruptions created by Gamergate also made space for new sorts of video games to break through.

Those who cannot express themselves daily now have the opportunity to be their true selves in video games that have emerged since Gamergate. The significance of Tillich's concept of theonomy for video games is that it encourages the hope of overcoming estrangement. With God understood as the ground of being, estrangement is separation from God and one's true nature. Estrangement is separation from a genuine unity, from one's essence.¹⁰ However, because nothing that exists can be separated from the ground of its existence, feelings of estrangement can be overcome.¹¹ When experiencing estrangement, of our lives being different than what they should be, video games can help people affirm their essence.¹² Conditions that produce anxiety remain real, but not the separation between existence and essence.¹³ While minorities still bear great mistreatment in societies, it is now possible for them to experience affirmation in video games that real world forces might not offer. For LGBTQ+ individuals who feel uncomfortable or unsafe being themselves due to local politics or the policies of religious institutions, there are now video games providing alternative means of affirmation. Games about coming out as a lesbian in high school are now made by development teams including lesbian members, for example. The interactive nature of video games provides players an environment in which they can actively express themselves while interacting with characters sharing their identity. Rather than merely suffering under

⁸ Leigh Alexander, "'Diversity Lounge'? PAX Has a Lot of Work to Do," *Gamasutra*, December 19, 2013, https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/207402/Diversity_Lounge_PAX_has_a_lot_of_work_to_do.php.

⁹ Jessica Conditt, "Fighting Depression in the Video Game World, One AFK at a Time," *Engadget*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.engadget.com/2016-03-25-mental-illness-video-games-take-this-please-knock.html>.

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, "The Philosophical Background of My Theology," in *Main Works*, vol. 1, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Carl Heinz Ratschow (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 418.

¹¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 204-206.

¹² Defending personal essence does not entail everyone sharing a common Aristotelean essence, just that the potential of someone to be X, Y, or Z—to be anything that they might become—is an absolute truth. The meaning of essence can be as simple as not being racist so as to not prevent people of other races from realizing their essence, for example. Conversely, if someone hinders others from being who they are, that is a sign they have not realized their own essence. For Tillich, part of realizing one's own essence involves making sure others can be similarly realized. See Paul Tillich, *My Search for Absolutes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 70-75.

¹³ Tillich, "The Philosophical Background of My Theology," 418.

heteronomous forces, such games provide spaces where historically marginalized identities can be explored, developed, and affirmed.

Theonomous Video Games

If Found... is a game made by DREAMFEEL about how a transgender woman is treated differently by friends and family. The game is available on the PC and the mouse is used to control the game, but the mouse icon appears as an eraser. That eraser is used to advance all pieces of the plot, which conveys to the player how people using the wrong name and pronouns can feel like being erased to a transgender individual. Reversing the process and being acknowledged can also feel like being created anew for the first time. Many other games could be listed that give players the chance to experience life from perspectives ranging from a lesbian teenager, immigrants fleeing for their lives, and Muslims fighting for their political rights.¹⁴ After giving talks about these topics at video game conventions, I am frequently approached by LGBTQ+ gamers who, without knowing Tillich or his terminology, basically describe to me how they get to be their essential selves in video games in ways that are still practically impossible outside of those virtual environments. Theonomy supports cultural autonomy. People are allowed to be themselves, transgender in the case of *If Found...*, while also understood as ultimately fulfilled due to their relation to the divine ground. Industry changes after Gamergate, and the sorts of games that those changes have made possible, have provided opportunities for personal fulfillment and affirmation for those facing social oppression and isolation. Just as Tillich developed a theology providing “the courage to be” for those experiencing meaninglessness, the video game industry is opening to its divine depths. Such potential within video games was also leveraged to solve unique problems brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁴ Many more games be could listed, but the following games are good places to start for those interested in investigating further. *Gone Home* by the Fulbright Company contains a story focused on a lesbian in high school. *Papers, Please* by Lucas Pope puts players face to face with immigrants at a border crossing. *1979 Revolution: Black Friday* by iNK Stories

Due to stay-at-home orders put in place worldwide during the heart of the pandemic, many people were unable to be themselves and find fulfillment by gathering with religious communities and participating in ritual practices. In the case of Christianity and Islam, many of the most restrictive orders to stay at home coincided with Easter and Ramadan, preventing Christians and Muslims from celebrating these important dates on the calendar. Nintendo’s video game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* offered a means of solving this real-world problem.

Animal Crossing is a somewhat simple and relaxing video game. Each player inhabits a unique island on which they can develop various buildings, gardens, farms, and decorate them all as they please. Players can interact with each other and swap items by visiting one another’s islands and chatting through an in-game interface. When churches around the United States had to close starting in March 2020, Erika Bergh realized an opportunity present within the game. She is the Pastor of Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church in Anchorage, Alaska and created a makeshift altar on her island using some tables and kitchen decorations available in the game.¹⁵ The result was a space where church members gathered weekly to celebrate communion together throughout the pandemic, including an Easter celebration. Furthermore, just as Tillich focused on the potential for novel and better developments to result from times of crisis, Bergh’s *Animal Crossing* church brought forth a previously unrealized possibility that was always present yet only brought to the forefront by the necessities of pandemic restrictions. Friends who live nowhere near Alaska were able to reconnect and worship with Bergh and other church members across thousands of miles thanks to *Animal Crossing*. Another example of video games being uniquely equipped to realize theonomous possibilities when facing pandemic difficulties is the way Muslims leveraged *Animal*

lets players control a Muslim photojournalist in the midst of the Iranian Revolution.

¹⁵ Lisa Smith Fiegel, “Video Game Church,” *Living Lutheran*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/06/video-game-church/>.

Crossing to celebrate Suhoor and Iftar meals during Ramadan.

Rami Ismail is a Dutch-Egyptian independent game developer who is also very open about being a Muslim, an openness about religion that is a rarity in the industry. He also does not shy away from bringing an explicitly religious critique to the industry in which he works. At the 2015 Game Developers Conference, Ismail took some of the biggest development and publishing companies in the industry to task for almost exclusively depicting Muslims and the Arabic world in general as unambiguously evil, usually as terrorists to be shot and killed.¹⁶ Such depictions of Muslims in games are distortions of deeper meaning that can be manifest in video games, and such talks by Ismail echo Tillich's prophetic voice about how the meaning of each of our lives can burst forth in or be distorted by cultural products. It is therefore not surprising that Ismail made a space in *Animal Crossing* for Muslims around the world to gather together for the breaking of the fast during Ramadan. While participants did eat meals in the real-world, players also brought unique items from their virtual farms and gardens to the in-game celebrations.¹⁷ While it is easy to deem such in-game gatherings poor substitutes for real-world gatherings, *Animal Crossing* was used to do some things better than the real world.

The inventions of Bergh and Ismail revealed how video games were *better equipped* to get around pandemic limitations than other pieces of technology like video conferencing in at least two ways. While it would have been possible to celebrate Easter and the breaking of fast during Ramadan by using webcams and video conferencing software like Zoom, all participants in such situations would still

¹⁶ Rami Ismail, "We Suck at Inclusivity: How Language Creates the Largest Invisible Minority for Games," *GDC Vault*, 2014, <https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1022362/We-Suck-at-Inclusivity-How>.

¹⁷ Imran Khan, "In Extraordinary Times, Ramadan Finds a Place in *Animal Crossing*," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2020/05/15/ramadan-animal-crossing/>.

¹⁸ Dexter Thomas, "We Joined a Ramadan Celebration in *Animal Crossing*," *VICE News*, May 23,

be isolated and separated in their different rooms. When Christian and Muslim players brought characters they control in *Animal Crossing* together on the same island, the result was a genuinely shared space and moment. While a virtually shared space is not the same as sharing a physical space, the pandemic also brought forth an unrealized possibility that improved the experiences of Muslims in some parts of the world. Some people who visited Ismail's island lived in cities with few to no other Muslims, or were attending colleges with poor support for non-Christian students. Participating in Ramadan through *Animal Crossing* was a better communal experience for them than breaking a fast outside the game, where they might have been alone.¹⁸ Just as the example of LGBTQ+ gamers already given, *some people are able to be more truly themselves within video games than in societies that do not always affirm their worth*. As would happen in a theonomous culture, people are searching for deep meaning in video games and putting what they find into action in the world.

Conclusion

Tillich located great depth of meaning and theological import in secular art during his lifetime. While good work has been done on Tillich and fine art,¹⁹ less work has been done regarding his theology of culture in relation to popular culture.²⁰ Gamergate revealed that pieces of popular culture like video games are not mere entertainment, but delivered this revelation through the negative heteronomous actions of those who defined video games as being for only certain sorts of video game fans who were empowered by such a limited definition to automatically discredit marginalized individuals and groups in the industry. However, a Tillichean lens applied to video games after Gamergate reveals

2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dzp7z/we-joined-a-ramadan-celebration-in-animal-crossing>.

¹⁹ Russell Re Manning, "Tillich's Theology of Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152-172.

²⁰ Jonathan Brant, *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). I concur with Brant that applying Tillich's theology systematically to popular culture is a real need.

novel developments within this piece of popular culture that are tied to their ultimate depth. There are now theonomous video games making Tillich's point that culture is the manifestation of religion and religion is the meaning of culture.²¹ When game developers do a good job of representing minorities in their games and marginalized players get to control players like themselves as their virtual lives are fulfilled, that is an experience that gives such players the courage to be themselves when the world does not make that easy. For non-marginalized players, the virtual encounters provided by such games offer a chance to learn about the dangers of heteronomy and put that lesson to work in order to create a participatory and non-polarized theonomous world.

Tillich and the Pandemic

Frederick J. Parrella

When I first decided on this particular topic, I thought it would be unique to Tillich scholars. I see that three of the five speakers had the same insight that I did! In these few minutes, suffering as all of us are with this deadly coronavirus and the great interruptions it has brought to our lives, I want to suggest a few insights from the thought of Paul Tillich. Our considerations will be, first, his understanding of the demonic and, second, his comments on health and disease that may give us a greater perspective on our present situation. If Tillich were with us today, he would surely discuss the pandemic in medical, historical, theological, and spiritual terms. I am also certain that he would make public announcements that would be sharply critical of how the American government has dealt with the crisis. The government's failure to attack the pandemic in a timely manner, as well as its utter unwillingness to create an organized plan in dealing with it, has caused the unnecessary and tragic deaths of tens of thousands of Americans.

²¹ Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 57.

²² Paul Tillich, *The Meaning of Health. The Relation of Religion and Health*, edited with an introduction by Paul Lee. Richmond, California: North Atlantic Books, 1981. Two essays which were first published in the

Tillich's book, *The Meaning of Health*, comprised of two lectures delivered in 1946 and 1961, was published some decades after his death.²² In many of his other writings, Tillich has little to say specifically about physical health and disease. Thus, in order to understand what he might say about the current pandemic, one must explore his ontology, especially his treatment of the ambiguity of life in the third volume of the *Systematic Theology*.

Tillich, as one knows, was a dialectical thinker. In his ontology, being makes no sense without the possibility of relative nonbeing. Nonbeing needs being to be, but when nonbeing dominates being, the demonic power within being emerges. He knew that whenever the depth of life, expressed in divine imagery, is expelled from human understanding, such divine depth re-appears in demonic guise.²³ Thus, he sees life only in its divine-demonic ambiguity.

So too with the meaning of health. As Tillich says, "Health is a meaningful term only in confrontation with its opposite—disease. And disease contains a partial negation of the essential nature of man. Conversely, in order to understand disease, one must know the essential nature of man as well as the possible distortions of it."²⁴ And again, "In this sense, health is disease conquered, as eternally the positive is positive by conquering the negative."²⁵

What does this ontological framework have to do with the current coronavirus pandemic? Tillich would surely see the pandemic as the radical emergence of nonbeing, the appearance in history of what seeks to negate and destroy history. Demonic forces pulsate through all of nature, from the inorganic to the organic, to the level of spirit. Likewise, they overpower all of the dimensions of the human person—the biological, the psychological, the historical, and the spiritual. Has our culture considered the pandemic *only* in clearly defined, finite

Review of Religion and Perspectives of Biology and Medicine.

²³ See Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, translated by N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 160-161.

²⁴ *The Meaning of Health*, 51.

²⁵ *The Meaning of Health*, 58.

categories—medical, political, and financial? Tragically, the pandemic will endure until our culture understands that the disease is attacking the very roots of being itself. Does our culture have both the ability and the will to fortify itself against such a powerful enemy?

Perhaps, if he were with us today, Tillich might begin with this question: To what degree is personal health possible in a society which is not a sane society? Are people confronting the darkness, the demonic power, at the heart of the pandemic? Why do some people refuse to wear masks? Why does a small minority, including some government officials, believe that the pandemic itself is a hoax, that there is no pandemic? Why did the President of the United States in October 2020 falsely claim that we had turned a corner in terms of progress with the pandemic? And all this while cases of new infections were skyrocketing! Of course, he said so *only* to further his own political advantage. An old professor of mine commented offhandedly, "Being takes care of its own." I might add that non-being does likewise. Beware! Our only hope is that our culture wakes up to this inevitable ominous outcome.

Tillich was prophetic in so many ways, and perhaps some of his words, published after his death, conclude these remarks on a positive note: "There is one only way. Everywhere, in every way possible, we as individuals must fight against the forces of destruction. First in ourselves, then on a group level. We must work for anything that will bring people together—but only in encounters where love and justice become creatively one."²⁶

Tillich, Populism and the Existential Crisis In Times of Covid 19

Ilona Nord

In a 1942 broadcast memorial in "Voice of America" Paul Tillich says: "The sense of freedom is lost when

insecurity and fear (of unemployment) fill the day and disturb the night. One then gets into a mood where security means everything and freedom means nothing. If this happens a million times over, democracy is lost."²⁷ I paraphrase for the year 2020: where health means everything and freedom means nothing, in this situation democracy is lost. In short, this is the position that many people of the anti-Corona movement in Germany agree with. In November 2020, a situation arose in Germany as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, in which part of the population acted, and continue to act, as if they believed that the citizens' sense of freedom was not only lost, but taken away. "We for the Basic Law", that is one slogan, another one is "Freedom, Peace, Justice and Love", on signs of the demonstrators there is also "For Truth, Justice and Freedom". Those who take part in the demonstrations are portrayed in news broadcasts with sometimes wild and abstruse positions. An intensive and controversial discussion about their position has not yet taken place, possibly because the liberal structure of our democracy reveals one of its weaknesses here. I again cite Müller "There is a tendency that liberals marginalize oppositional populist groups ... One excludes in the name of morality, just as populists morally exclude some citizens from the true, trying to have homogenous people. But instead of morally discrediting, liberal democrats should first discuss, if only to set the facts straight. In cases where populists incite sedition or even incite violence, criminal law applies. But in all others ... one must now claim the requirements... of the citizens seriously. A 'revolt of the decent', who pat each other on the back for their decency, is not enough."²⁸

Populism is part of democracy. The churches have even incorporated it into their models and understandings of the organization: The concept of the people's church makes this obvious. The point is not to exclude and abolish populism, but to recognize it as a political phenomenon. Its influence must also be countered by political means, that is, by

²⁶ Quoted in Grace Calí, *Paul Tillich First Hand: A Memoir of the Harvard Years*. Introduction by Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago: The Exploration Press, 1996), 93.

²⁷ Paul Tillich, "Freedom in the Age of Change" in *For and Against Socialism* (Stuttgart: Wolf-Dieter Marsch, 1940) 94.

²⁸ Jan-Werner Müller. "What Is Populism?" in *Berlin*, 2017, 131.

discussion and the rule of law. That this is by no means an easy task has been shown by last week's German political events. The influence and scope of the current right-wing populism in Germany is considerable.

With the attitude that they are the true people, representatives of the so called *Lateral Thinkers Movement* not only verbally attack the government of the country, but they also personally invade the building of the Reichstag, the seat of parliament. They are of the opinion that the people are currently represented by false, corrupt elites who cheat them of their basic rights. In alliance with the political party *Alternative for Germany* (AfD), the intruders have succeeded in penetrating the offices of some members of parliament, threatening and insulting them. They were given this opportunity by the right of two deputies of the AfD, who had legitimized these persons as guests. The political symbolism of this attack was intensified in the background by a petition against an amendment to the Infection Protection Act. It has been published via [openpetition.de](https://www.openpetition.de). The new paragraph lists concrete measures (distance commandments, mask obligation, contact restrictions, meeting and travel prohibitions as well as closures). It sets higher hurdles for the restriction of demonstrations and services, exit restrictions and visits in hospitals and nursing homes can be limited only with difficulty. The law also states that health protection alone must no longer be the sole consideration of social and economic aspects when issuing ordinances. The incidence value of 35-50 new infections per day and 100,000 inhabitants* is made transparent as a benchmark. Central to these legal regulations was the criticism of the legal principle that all essential decisions must be made by the legislator, the parliament. The corona measures were not taken by parliament, but by the governments. In the petition,

²⁹ See M. Fuchs (2020) New edition of the IFSG: No to the enabling legislation! [Neuaufgabe des IFSG: Nein zur Ermächtigungsgrundlage!]. online available <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/neuaufgabe-des-ifsg-nein-zur-ermaechtigungsgrundlage> and F. Neuhann (2020), Commentary on infection control-Not an enabling law-but worthy of criticism [Kommentar zum Infektionsschutz-Kein Ermächtigungsgesetz - aber kritikwürdig]. Online

the amendment to the law is now linked to the Enabling Act of 1933; the law is said to be tantamount to an enabling basis for the government.²⁹ In the Enabling Act of March 24, 1933, the German Reichstag decided at that time that the legislative power was in fact completely transferred to Adolf Hitler. It is to be suggested that the current government be seen as a corona dictatorship. It is suggested to the public that these are one-time restrictions of fundamental rights. The legal side of enabling principles and their regular legal regulation within democracies is not discussed. Instead, a *status confessionis* is called for, in that the protection of human dignity by the state is seen to be in jeopardy. The fact that restrictions on fundamental rights are part of the state's legal action is ignored and Corona is stylized as an absolute exception in the literal sense of the word. The pandemics no longer threaten the health of individuals alone, but societies as a whole.

Rudolf Stichweh, sociologist, says: "Building up a social immune system for pandemics will be the main task for the coming months and years - and this is independent of and more important than the question of whether and when we have vaccinations and therapies against Covid-19."³⁰ In addition, he describes the system of religions as the real losers of the Corona crisis. The reason for this is that "apparently nowhere are religious interpretations of the virus-induced crisis events available and play a relevant role."³¹

I started this article with a quotation from Tillich, which emphasizes the freedom of men and women. He did that in recourse to the context of National Socialism. An analogy arises that can be personally unpleasant and politically unappetizing, as Jan Werner Müller once put it.³² It is important to me to mention this. And there is one thing more, Tillich's

available

<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/kritik-infektionsschutzgesetz-kommentar-neuhann-100.html>

³⁰ Rudolf. Stichweh, "Simplification of the Social," in *The Corona Society Analyses of the Situation and Perspectives for the Future*, ed. Volkmer, M. & Werner, K. (Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2020), 196.

³¹ Stichweh, "Simplification," 203.

³² Müller, "What Is Populism?" 131.

theology will hardly be able to provide adequate answers to today's questions and a grand interpretation of the crisis. Rather, for me the potential of his philosophical theology lies elsewhere. He calls for us to think again about the question of freedom and how to deal with it in the pandemic. Tillich follows ancient philosophy when he says, "Man is who is free, and free is who participates in the self-determination of the historical group to which he belongs. Civil rights, freedom and humanitarianism are identical."³³ Both sides of freedom, the natural and the historical, belong together. In a crisis like the pandemic, it is essential that this insight is not lost. The many people whose existence is economically destroyed, who lose their independence from state subsidies and their self-efficacy, they are also robbed of their creativity and thus debased. For Tillich Freedom is closely related to the possibility of individual creative activity. This is more than a reason to take to the streets and fight for freedom and justice. There is a lack of clear social solidarity with those who are existentially affected by the pandemic; there is a lack of social agencies that intervene and dissolve the opposition between lateral thinkers, AfD and government/parliament. The concept and experience of freedom is a core element of the social and political constitution as well as of Tillich's theology and philosophy. There is a clear public need to develop their meaning.

New Publications by Members

Why Tillich? Why Now

Edited by Thomas G. Bandy
Forthcoming, October 2021
Mercer University Press

Playing as Others: Theology and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games

Benjamin J. Chicka
Forthcoming, October 2021
Baylor University Press

Editor's Note

If you have a manuscript you are looking to publish, members of the society may be able to mentor you. If you would like your recent publications to be featured in the *Bulletin*, or if you have presented at a NAPTS conference and would like your work published in the *Bulletin*, please send the information to veheret@mercyhurst.edu.

In Memoriam

In Memoriam: Tom F. Driver

Frederick J. Parrella

I was deeply saddened when Marion Pauck informed me that Tom Driver had passed away. I was a young naïve graduate student in Theology at Fordham University in 1966 when I first met Prof. Driver. (At that time, Fordham and Union Theological Seminary were exchanging professors, and Fordham was blessed to have Tom visiting Fordham's Rose Hill campus in the Bronx that semester.) When I walked into the seminar room and saw Tom for the first time, I still remember both the power and the gentleness of his presence. Tom's seminar was a revelation to me, changing my life by teaching me the extraordinary breadth and depth of Tillich's thought. I would never have imagined writing a dissertation on Tillich without Tom! He was one of the finest and most inspiring teachers I have ever had. His contribution to Tillich's thought and scholarship will endure long after his passing. Tom and I have exchanged emails and Christmas cards for more than half-century. I cherish his memory and the gift of insight and wisdom he has given to me.

Echol Lee Nix, Jr.

The NAPTS is also saddened to announce the recent death of Echol Lee Nix, Jr. He had a tremendous impact on many of the members of the society, both senior and new scholars. As Lawrence Whitney put it so eloquently, "Grant to Echol Nix eternal rest, O God, and may light perpetually shine upon him."

³³ Tillich, "Freedom," 98.