



BULLETIN

The North American Paul Tillich Society

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**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NAPTS
FRIDAY NOVEMBER 22, 2019**

The North American Paul Tillich Society will hold its annual meeting in San Diego, California on November 22 and 23, as always in conjunction with the meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. The principal hotel for the American Academy of Religion is the Marriott Marquis Hotel, 333 West Harbor Drive, San Diego, California. The phone number is 619.234.1500.

The Program:

P22-108

Friday - 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

North American Paul Tillich Society

Theme: *Tillich and Education and Tillich Society Fellow Workshop*

Hilton Bayfront-Aqua 307 (Third Level)

- Illona Nord: "Tillich and Theology of Education"

- Tony Pacyna: “Praxeology of Love: Education according to Tillich”
- Ben Siu-Pun Ho: “Post-truth Politics and Post-Tillichian Perspective: Engaging the Post-truth Phenomenon with the Legacy of Paul Tillich”

P22-213**Friday - 1:00 PM-3:00 PM****North American Paul Tillich Society****Theme:** *Tillich and Political Theology Book Panel**Hilton Bayfront-Aqua 305 (Third Level)*

- Rachel Sophia Baard
- Lon Weaver
- Mark Lewis Taylor
- Ron Stone
- Michele Watkins
- Andre Price
- Sigridur Gudmarsdottir
- Verna Ehret
- Ruben Rosario Rodriguez
- Ben Siu-Pun Ho

P22-326**Friday - 3:00 PM-5:00 PM****North American Paul Tillich Society****Theme:** *Tillich and Confucianism**Marriott Marquis-Balboa (South Tower - Third Level)*

- Lawrence Whitney: “Confucianism and Tillich’s Protestant Principle”
- Heup Young Kim: “Who is a right Confucian-Christian dialogue partner to Wang Yang-ming, Paul Tillich or Karl Barth?”

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Owen, Jane Blaffer. *Avant-Garde in the Cornfields: Architecture, Landscape, and Preservation in New Harmony, Indiana.*

- Loye Ashton: “Ultimate Reality, Taiji, and the Interdependence of Cosmology, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Tillich and Zhu Xi”

P22-404**Friday - 5:00 PM-6:30 PM****North American Paul Tillich Society****Theme:** *Business Meeting: the Officers**Lecture and Presentation:*

“Tillich for Today and Tomorrow”

Marriott Marquis-Pacific 24 (First Level)

- Devan Stahl
- Adam Pryor

N.B. A breakfast meeting will be held on Saturday morning for the Board of Director of the Society, Time and place will be announced at the last Friday session of Society or at the banquet.

NAPTS ANNUAL BANQUET**Buca di Beppo Restaurant**

San Diego

705 6th Avenue
San Diego, 92101
7-10 pm
Cash Bar
\$55.00 per person

N.B. Please contact the Secretary Treasurer, Frederick J. Parrella, for reservations.

A major conference was held in New Harmony in June of 1999, and a second volume of Mrs. Owen’s reflections has just been published by the University of Minnesota Press. The coeditors are Ben Nicholson and Michelangelo Sabatino.

TILlich – A CHILD’S PERSPECTIVE

TED FARRIS

Paul Tillich still had two years remaining as a Professor at Union Theological Seminary when I was born in New York at Madison Avenue Hospital (now Mount Sinai) in March 1953. Paul, or “Paulus” as many called him, was 67 years my senior.

I lived with my parents, Mutie and Ted, and my younger sister Madeline, on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, a half block across Broadway from Union Seminary in a Columbia University building. My father was an administrator at Columbia’s Teacher’s College and my mother, Mutie, Paul Tillich’s daughter, was studying for her Ph.D. in comparative literature at Columbia under Professor Maurice Valency, who was Lionel Trilling’s rival in the Columbia English Department.¹

My time in New York during Tillich’s remaining tenure at Union Theological Seminary was spent mostly in a crib or baby carriage, and I thus have limited recollections of the outside world from this period. However, Hannah Tillich told me that, although I was oblivious to the honor, she, my grandfather, and Rheinhold Neibuhr occasionally pushed my perambulator around Riverside Park in the environs of Grant’s Tomb. While I unfortunately remember nothing of their conversations, I learned from an early age and can remember to this day who is buried in Grant’s Tomb! And, I am happy to have been the excuse for a few Tillich and Neibuhr conversations.

Having just given up a palatial apartment in the old gothic Union Seminary building, the Tillichs had taken a flat on Claremont Avenue. In 1955 they moved to Cambridge, where Tillich became a University Professor at Harvard. I moved on from my baby carriage to accept a barely memorable one year unpaid stint at the Greenhouse Nursery School on Morningside Drive.

¹ Later Mutie confessed to me her long-time affair with Dr. Valency. Valency, who was a devilish charmer, also had an affair with Mutie’s best friend and colleague, Virginia H. After graduating Harvard and interning at Austin Riggs in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, Mutie’s only sibling, René Tillich, had moved to Berkeley, California to pursue a Ph.D. in humanistic psychology.

I remember Hannah as a benevolent and interested presence from a very young age. I called her “Oma” and Paul “Opa” in the German manner. My grandparents spoke to each other in German and to me in heavily accented English, interspersed with German words. When I was 3 or 4 years old, Paul took Mutie on a long trip to Europe. I later learned that his mission was to reconnect with old friends and family and to see the state of post-war Germany. I considered myself a primary beneficiary of this expedition, because Hannah took me up to Cambridge to stay with her in the Tillichs’ Chauncy Street ground floor apartment, just north of Harvard Yard. Walking around Cambridge with my grandmother and reveling in the very good care she took of me during that several months trip, resulted in our forming a lifelong bond. I think having a small boy with her while Paulus and Mutie were away, was a great comfort to Hannah and for me it was a great treat to be the spoiled grandson.



Hannah Tillich and her grandson, Ted Farris

At that time, Hannah and Paul spent most of each summer together at their East Hampton house, and my father drove the family out many weekends to stay with them. Since the Tillich cottage, although recently renovated in 1956, had

only three bedrooms, I am not sure how we managed the sleeping arrangements, but somehow it all worked out. At some point they built a small bedroom just for me in the basement. The East Hampton house, which was Hannah's sanctuary and refuge, has a two-and-a-half-acre garden of immense weeping beeches, copper beeches, evergreens, and apple trees. My grandfather used to walk around the property, at times lost in meditative thoughts. Tillich loved his trees, many of which he and Hannah planted after a garden store went out of business in the 1940s. One of the only times he yelled at me as a child was when I performed a vigorous pretend boxing demonstration against one of his favorite weeping beech trees, knocking leaves and small branches to the ground. While I thought my Muhammad Ali imitation a great accomplishment, Tillich did not, and said so with a red-faced anguished Germanic howl. After this, I confined my tree boxing to times when Paul wasn't looking.



Ted Farris with his Grandfather, Paul Tillich

Hannah loved owls and sometimes called herself and signed notes as "The Owl." After she died, a number of people, who stayed in the East Hampton house, insisted that Hannah's spirit remained and could be detected in the late night hours. My ex-wife, Amanda Ross, was especially insistent on Hannah's continuing presence which I sometimes felt myself. When Amanda and I were divorcing, she and my son Alex lived in the East Hampton house while the divorce was being resolved. Amanda told me that one evening, after a lightning strike which cracked open a large dead oak tree near the house, she saw a giant owl emerge from the hollowed out trunk and fly away. After that, the reports of Hannah's spiritual presence in the house ceased.

The Tillichs' presence remains strongly felt in the Woods Lane house, by way of the hundreds of dusty books that line the living room shelves. There are the books Paul read and also a multitude of translations of his own work. Hannah's books are there too, along with the household items, portraits and old photographs of their German ancestors that are very much as she left them. Among the most magnificent trees are two gigantic weeping beeches that Hannah called the "Old Man" and the "Old Lady." The long swaying branches of the "Old Lady" graze the side of the house whenever a breeze passes.

The big activity in East Hampton was going to the beach. Hannah had by this time broken Paul of his imperial Germanic habit of building a large platform of sand on which to place his beach chair at a height above all others. However, my grandfather still brought a big metal garden shovel to the beach, and we used it to build big but artistically undistinguished sand castles and protective sea walls to keep the waves from our towels and chairs.

Hannah or my father did the driving in East Hampton because neither Paul nor Mutie could drive. Hannah and Paul often had dinner or cocktail parties where the red wine and conversation flowed. After I graduated from the children's table, I could participate and sometimes get a small glass of wine. Dinner guests included a good number of writers, local artists, and intellectuals, including Alfonso Ossorio and his extravagantly costumed boyfriend, Ted Dragon, art critic Harold Rosenberg, writer Jeffrey Potter, once with *The New York Post* owner Dolly Schiff, Artist Ingeborg ten Haeff, and I am told Willem de Kooning (in the years before I was born), salon personality Nanda Anshen, the *Death of God* dandy Tom Altizer (usually in bright red or green pants), pop Psychoanalyst and Tillich Ph.D. student Rollo May, sculptor Costantino Nivola and his wife, Ruth, and later the weaver and LongHouse Reserve founder, Jack Lenor Larsen. Other East Hampton guests included Tillich's biographers, Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, Max Horkheimer, and the charismatic Theodor Adorno (whose real name, "Teddy Wiesengrund" was the source of some mirth and whose visit preceded my birth). I was painfully shy as a young boy, and when the

Tillichs had large cocktail parties, I sometimes hid under the bed in my basement refuge.

Alfonso Ossorio, who was Jackson Pollock's patron, owned the magnificent fifty-nine acre estate known as "The Creeks" (now owned by Ron Perelman) overlooking Georgica Pond. Ossorio was the most erudite and gracious man I have ever met. He had exquisite, but outrageous aesthetic sensibilities and had acquired a magnificent art collection filled with paintings of Dubuffet and Pollock. Ossorio spent millions of dollars a year planting and moving extraordinary exotic trees and primary colored sculptures around his property. He also hosted decadent and lavish parties at the house on the pond. He seemed to have read everything and knew everyone in the artistic and literary worlds, but what I remember was his kindness and generosity to Hannah in later years, and he allowed her unrestricted access to walk on his remarkable property. He even gave her occasional packets of what he called "mad money" to spend on herself. Meanwhile, his long-time boyfriend, the often extravagantly dressed Ted Dragon got in trouble with the police for lifting art objects, knickknacks, and small furniture pieces from the great houses along Georgica Beach and the Pond. After "borrowing" them, he would refurbish or repaint them to display in the Creek's grand living room where, of course, some of his guests eventually recognized their missing pieces.

Ossorio aside, this was at a time when East Hampton was more of an artists' and writers' colony than a haven for the super-rich of Wall Street, the celebrity media, and fashion people who frequent the East End of Long Island today. And the Tillichs' crowd was the intellectual and artistic set, not the old money WASP social crowd to be found at the Maidstone Club. We didn't play golf or tennis or follow any other sporting pursuits. Hannah, however, was a devoted and accomplished yogi and practiced every morning at home. I remember walking in on her, and it was strange to see her sitting with her tongue sticking out and her belly pulled in to the point where it looked like her belly button was almost touching her spine.

Tillich spent every morning writing until around 11, and Hannah did not permit my sister and me to disturb him during his work time. The East Hampton house and garden are very seclud-

ed and peaceful and thus conducive to writing and reflection. It comes as no surprise that quite a number of books have been written in whole or in part in that Woods Lane house (including, improbably enough, parts of *Sex and the City*). Tillich also played chess with me as a child and, for some reason I could never fathom, he always won!

My first encounter with religion came at age five when Mutie announced to my horror that she was taking me to Sunday school at the Riverside Church. I was quite a shy little boy, and the prospect of sitting in a church building with complete strangers on a precious Sunday when I could be watching TV was more than I could bear. I recall standing in the lobby of our building at 540 West 122nd Street arguing with my mother and insisting I would not go. She told me I would learn a lot about religion and God. I said "I refuse," a favorite expression of mine as a child. Then I remember being seized by an epiphany. "Mommy, there's no such thing as God!", I announced definitively. I think this was the first time I had really thought about the subject.

Mutie said, "You'll like Sunday school. You can play with toys and listen to stories."

I pretended to go along with her idea, and we walked to the Riverside Church. After she left, I waited until the teacher wasn't looking and sneaked out of the class and went to the Teacher's College playground. I never went back to Sunday school after that, so whatever it was I was supposed to have learned, I didn't. And I have remained a skeptic to this day.

God was not a subject of discussion at the Tillichs' dinner table. Hannah was opposed to institutionalized religion, and Paul talked about books, philosophical or political ideas, or about art and his travels, so the subject did not come up again. Instead of saying grace before dinner, we touched hands, which was a gesture of community and family connection but not religious in character. Hannah was very interested in Tibetan Buddhism and in the ideas of Joseph Campbell who was popular at that time. She was attracted to the idea of religions as archetypal myths.

Hannah was infatuated with President Kennedy, and I remember Paul and Hannah were very excited to attend the inauguration. Kennedy had invited many intellectuals and artists, and Paul had just been on the cover of *Time* Magazine and was

included in the 1960 festivities. I remember it as a very important occasion for Hannah and Paul. As the Tillichs were then spending most of the academic year in Cambridge with occasional trips to New York, we saw less of them in winter but it was always a family occasion when they arrived. They usually stayed at the Roosevelt Hotel around the corner from the Pan Am Building, and took us out to dinner during these visits. I usually gained some presents and a few dollars of spending money in the course of their visits. This I spent on comic books and candy.

The Kennedy assassination in November 1963 was a great shock, probably the greatest of my childhood. I was sitting in my second-grade classroom at the Agnes Russell Elementary School (formerly the Horace Mann School, which Mutie also attended), when they announced the President had been shot and wheeled a black and white television into the classroom that we watched in stunned silence. Many of us cried and so did our teacher. They sent us home and all television programming and school were suspended for several days. Hannah was absolutely devastated. It seemed like the end of all hope. But the Tillichs were in Chicago so we did not see them but talked by telephone, mostly with Hannah. When I saw her for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, she talked about the assassination a lot. It seemed to her as though the nation was falling into the hands of barbarians.

I learned of Tillich's heart attack in 1965 when Hannah flew off to Chicago to be with Paul. There were lots of phone calls with my mother and then she left too. She was very grim when she returned, but I don't remember much from that time. It really was at his Memorial Service in New Harmony, Indiana the next Spring that his death hit home. It was exciting to hear all the tributes in Philip Johnson's new Roofless Church. New Harmony had been a Utopian community founded by Robert Owen. Jane Owen, who had married a descendant of Robert Owen, had beautifully restored the little village and its *Red Geranium Hotel* where you can still see photos of Tillich and the Memorial Service. Most of Tillich's ashes were placed in Tillich Park. The remainder Hannah took to India and scattered in the Ganges in 1966. A wonderful and well attended 50th anniversary

celebration of Tillich's death was also held in New Harmony in 2015 for which I am most grateful.

After New Harmony, for many years I had a recurring dream of my grandfather appearing in the distance. I tried to speak with him but sometimes he just looked at me. Sometimes we had conversations and I asked, "Are you really still alive," and he said Yes that I had only dreamed he was gone. Of course, there was always a distance with Tillich. He was gracious but cerebral and self-contained. He did not pick me up or do much in the way of hugging. But when his son, my uncle René Tillich visited, he would hug me and put me on top of the refrigerator which left me giddy with excitement since it seemed so high up and I was too little to get down. René had tremendous energy and affection and often a new girlfriend when he arrived. His first marriage to Mary Roy, with whom he had two children, dissolved after René left to work on his Ph.D. at Berkeley and was thrown into the 1960s time of free love, drugs, and rock and roll. Eventually, he moved to a commune he established in Hawaii with his new wife, Linda, a psychologist he had met at Berkeley. They did couples therapy together and I think there was occasional free love thrown into the bargain. René talked constantly in the 1960s about the need for honesty in relationships. He had a love/hate relationship with Hannah and, perhaps based on his honesty technique, they often had violent, scary quarrels that were not helped by René's love of alcohol and Hannah's fear of it. Hannah, whose father was a heavy drinker, greatly feared the lack of self-control that heavy drinking brought on in René. On my first visit to René at his Sunset Beach house in Oahu, I found his freezer filled with LSD-infused sugar cubes. We snorkeled, built bonfires and inhaled wonderful substances while watching the surfers on the famous North Shore Beach. René would take long swims with his spear gun often coming back with a nice big fish for dinner.

I did not read Tillich as a teenager, in part because his books looked intimidatingly serious and also because I mistakenly thought that they were mostly about religion. It wasn't until later in life that I became aware of the nature of his thought and of its great depth and insight. This is, I think, a shame, but somehow no one encouraged me to read Tillich or maybe they just assumed I did read

him. I became more interested when Hannah was writing her own controversial autobiography. That was very important for her. While her disclosure of Paul's marital infidelities angered many friends of Paul, writing the book purged Hannah of a lot of anger and conflicted feelings, allowing her to work through them and become an autonomous being again. Hannah was not really a feminist, although she was admired by many European feminists, but she was a very strong self-sufficient woman. She managed the household money, drove Paul and Mutie and us kids around and arranged cocktail parties and dinners in East Hampton as well as arranged all family holidays and logistics. She was also a voracious reader. She was quite upset when the German side of Tillich's family succeeded in having her book, *From Time to Time*, banned in Germany for defaming Tillich as a German public figure. How ironic in light of the way Germany had treated them both in the 1930s! Now, suddenly, they wanted to protect Tillich's reputation from his wife's autobiography.

Hannah also wrote many weird surrealist plays but they were never published. Her writing needed editing or "Englishing," as she called it. I helped her edit her travel book called *From Place to Place*. She rented Ossorio's gate house and we worked on it over the summer after my freshman year at Columbia.

Hannah had a different worldview from Paul. She retained a certain Germanic arrogance and believed in an intellectual elite and the myth of the hero (e.g., JFK). She also had an intuitive feel for people's strengths and weaknesses. Hannah had a way of looking right through people into their deepest insecurities and then pointing them out. My girlfriends were interrogated unmercifully. There was little I could do to protect them, other than to keep them away from East Hampton. The subject of "ethics" made her scoff, and she felt that academic discussions of ethics led to nothing useful. She felt the whole subject of ethics was for "wimps" as she liked to call the weak and insipid people she despised. Hannah had a Nietzschean temperament. She hated the American love of the "underdog" and was incensed that Jimmy Carter carried his own luggage into the White House after his inauguration. I said he was trying to make a gesture that he was a common man who could take responsibility for attending to his own per-

sonal needs. But Hannah had contempt for this friendly peanut farmer and preferred the pomp of Camelot for an American leader.

I don't know what Paul thought of all this, but I do think he admired her sharp intuitive insights into people. He was generally warm and gracious and tried to put people at ease and make them feel that he believed they were perceptive and intelligent. He had a very positive warm side to his character and did not try to undermine or intimidate others. I think Hannah was unafraid to assert herself and make enemies while Paul had better political skills and made an effort to make friends and avoid unnecessary enemies. At the same time, Hannah fought for him loyally when he needed it. Both were courageous in their own way.

After I did well in law school and took a job at the "prestigious" law firm of Sullivan & Cromwell—the partners always joked that the word "prestigious" was part of the firm name—Hannah was very proud. At Sullivan & Cromwell I was completely separated from my academic background and I threw myself into the world of deals and public offerings in the 1980s just as the entire world economy was expanding like never before. My first encounter with Tillich's more important works came by way of picking up and flipping through *The Courage to Be*, one of his most popular books. After looking at the table of contents, I turned to the last page and read the curiously ambiguous last sentence:

"The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."

I read it several times. Certainly, its ambiguity was intentional. Tillich wouldn't write a sentence like that without thinking very carefully about it. He even put it in italics. But what did it mean?

The preceding sentences shed some light.

"The courage to take the anxiety of meaninglessness upon oneself is the boundary line up to which the courage to be can go. Beyond it is mere non-being. Within it all forms of courage are re-established in the power of God above the God of theism."

Now this was a passage that commanded interest. Rife as it is with apparent ambiguity, it presents Tillich standing at the boundary of the religious

divide. And its meaning seemed immediately clear to me. Yet I have never seen or heard it clearly explained by any Tillich scholar.

When the god of theism has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt, what appears is the god above god or the power of one's own being. That means that when you confront the non-existence of the religious or theistic conception of god, you become strengthened with the knowledge of the power of your own being, a power which is above and beyond theistic conceptions and is in fact the creator of all of those religious conceptions.

This interpretation has Tillich crossing the boundary of religious faith into the existentialist belief in one's own personal courage and power as a being. And this, after all, is the purpose and conclusion of all philosophical thought which must always come back to the self, the human being trying to understand the universe, but always returning to itself and its own subjective interests which ultimately create the only world we can live in, that of our own being.

**A MISUNDERSTOOD BESTSELLER
CRITICAL REMARKS ON TILlich'S BOOK
*THE COURAGE TO BE*¹**

WERNER SCHÜSSLER

"The effect of greatness is also strong when being misunderstood." This sentence by Karl Jaspers applies like no other to Tillich's bestseller "The Courage to Be"! For those who enthusiastically welcomed this book may have understood it one-sidedly. This may be understandable for readers who are not familiar with Tillich's writings. But even some Tillich scholars have argued that this book, listed under "The 100 Best Spiritual Books of the Century" and the best-selling book of Yale University Press, is the best introduction to Tillich's thinking. With my following remarks I strongly disagree with this view and try to show that "The Courage to Be" must not be read in isolation from Tillich's complete *œuvre*. Thus, it becomes clear that Tillich intentionally exaggerated various aspects in this book one-sidedly out of an apologetic interest.

1. Does faith really not need a concrete content?

Tillich lived on the boundary between theology and philosophy, between belief and non-belief, and science and religion, between his German upbringing and the new freedom of America, between fame and the private person, between family and divorce from family, between societal expectations and obligations and the pressing desires of his own flesh for intimacy and companionship, or, as he might have said, between the divine and the demonic.

And at the intersection of all those things where most of us live is the only place we can seek balance for the power of our own being, which is ultimately the only power we can look to for joy and solace in the universe.

East Hampton, New York
October 2019

As is well known, the book ends with an enigmatically sounding sentence that is often quoted, but almost never commented on: "The Courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."²

Before Tillich can formulate this top sentence, he gives long explanations on the subject of courage, critically examines the concept of "theism" and introduces the concepts "absolute faith" and "God above God". But these are themes and concepts with various theological and philosophical preconditions. Thus I've always asked myself how well an ordinary reader can really understand this book.

In short, the sentence quoted above implies that theological theism is transcended and that it is sufficient to refer to the "God above God" through "absolute faith" which has no concrete content. This almost sounds like a spirituality without God or at least like mystical ideas which refer to an absolutely transcendent God and which leave behind every concrete content of faith. But is this really what Tillich meant to convey?

Christoph Rhein, who presented one of the first introductions to Paul Tillich's thinking in the German-speaking world,³ reports of a conversa-

tion he had with Tillich in Berlin on September 18, 1954. Here Rhein asked Tillich about the transcendence of theism and the apparently purely negative and delimiting character of the thoughts in the last chapter of *The Courage to Be*. According to Rhein Tillich replied as follows:

First, the book was written for people who were possessed by radical doubt. Hence the philosophical argumentation, language, and attitude. Secondly, however, when writing the last pages of the book, he asked himself whether it was not necessary to say more about the 'God over God' after all. It would be quite possible at this point to include an outline of one's entire theological system. Nevertheless, he had not done so, but had allowed the conclusion to run out 'like a needle point' that should sting.⁴

These words suggest that Tillich's argumentation in "The Courage to Be" is deliberately formulated one-sidedly in order to reach the radical doubter. Also, Tillich's own statement taken from his introduction to the second volume of the *Systematic Theology* includes his claim:

In the last chapter of my book *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) I have written of the God above the God of theism. This has been misunderstood as a dogmatic statement of a pantheistic or mystical character. First of all, it is not a dogmatic, but an apologetic, statement. It takes seriously the radical doubt experienced by many people. It gives one the courage of self-affirmation even in the extreme state of radical doubt. In such a state the God of both religious and theological language disappears. But something remains, namely, the seriousness of that doubt in which meaning within meaninglessness is affirmed. The source of this affirmation of meaning within meaninglessness, of certitude within doubt, is not the God of traditional theism but the 'God above God,' the power of being which works through those who have no name for it, not even the name God. This is the answer to those who ask for a message in the nothingness of their situation and at the end of their courage to be. *But such an extreme point is not a space within which one can live.* The dialectics of an extreme situation are a criterion of truth

but not the basis on which a whole structure of truth can be built.⁵

The statement "such an extreme point is not a space within which one can live" already indicates that the religious faith cannot be exhausted with its reference to the "God above God".

This becomes clear once again with regard to Tillich's book, *Dynamics of Faith*, from 1957:

Only certain is the ultimacy as ultimacy, the infinite passion as infinite passion. This is a reality given to the self with his own nature. It is as immediate and as much beyond doubt as the self is to the self. It *is* the self in its self-transcending quality. But there is no certainty of this kind about the content of our ultimate concern, be it nation, success, a god, or the God of the Bible: They all are contents without immediate awareness. This acceptance as matters of ultimate concern is a risk and therefore an act of courage. There is a risk if what was considered as a matter of ultimate concern proves to be a matter of preliminary and transitory concern – as, for example, the nation. The risk to fail⁶ in one's ultimate concern is indeed the greatest risk man can run. For if it proves to be a failure, the meaning of one's life breaks down; one surrenders oneself, including truth and justice, to something which is not worth it. One has given away one's personal center without having a chance to regain it. The reaction of despair in people who have experienced the breakdown of their national claims is an irrefutable proof of the idolatrous character of their national concern. In the long run this is the inescapable result of an ultimate concern, the subject matter of which is not ultimate. And this is the risk faith must take; this is the risk which is unavoidable if a finite being affirms itself. Ultimate concern is ultimate risk and ultimate courage. It is not risk and needs no courage with respect to ultimacy itself. But it is risk and demands courage if it affirms a concrete concern. *And every faith has a concrete element in itself. It is concerned about something or somebody.* But this something or this somebody may prove to be not ultimate at all. *Then faith is a failure in its concrete expression, although it is not a failure in the experience of the unconditional itself. A god disappears; divinity remains. Faith risks the vanishing of the con-*

crete god in whom it believes. It may well be that with the vanishing of the god the believer breaks down without being able to re-establish his centered self by a new content of his ultimate concern. This risk cannot be taken away from any act of faith.⁷

The sentence “A god disappears; divinity remains. Faith risks the vanishing of the concrete god in whom it believes” sounds almost like a paraphrase of the last words from “The Courage to Be”. But in this section from “Dynamics of Faith” it becomes clear that faith always contains a concrete element, i. e. that it is never without a concrete content.

This view is also underlined by the following remarks from *Dynamics of Faith*:

Living faith includes the doubt about itself, the courage to take this doubt into itself, and the risk of courage. There is an element of immediate certainty in every faith, which is not subject to doubt, courage and risk – the unconditional concern itself. It is experienced in passion, anxiety, despair, ecstasy. *But it is never experienced in isolation from a concrete content. It is experienced in, with and through the concrete content, and only the analytic mind can isolate it theoretically.* Such theoretical isolation is the basis of this whole book; it is the way to the definition of faith as ultimate concern. But the life of faith itself does not include such analytic work. Therefore, the doubt about the concrete content of one’s ultimate concern is directed against faith in its totality, and faith as a total act must affirm itself through courage.⁸

2. Does theism really have to be transcended?

Tillich’s alleged “Theism transcended” also belongs into the context of these considerations. This aspect, too, is readily adopted uncritically. However, it must be critically asked whether Tillich’s understanding of “theism” is adequate.

The concept of theism (alongside “deism” and “pantheism”) has undergone a complicated development in terms of conceptual history. Voltaire, for example, uses it similarly to Rousseau in the sense of a “religion pure”, which needs no church, no dogmas and rites, while Diderot uses this term to describe the natural religion of the Enlightenment. It is well known that Kant is re-

sponsible for the distinction between the deist who believes in God as the supreme cause, and the theist who believes in a living God. Today the concept of theism is usually associated with the idea of a perfect, living and personal God. In English philosophy, however, the term often stands quite undifferentiated for a thinking that assumes the existence of a divine instance.

Because Tillich uses the concept of theism in *The Courage to Be* in a quite pejorative sense, the untrained reader is forced to think that this must really be transcended and that theology and philosophy in the time before Tillich generally had the tendency to make God a being beside other beings. But the classical tradition was by no means as naive and flat as Tillich sometimes likes to portray it. I do not want to diminish Tillich’s importance in any way. With regard to his interpretation of other positions however one must always critically ask whether he really does justice to them. Of course, one must not overlook the fact that Tillich was not a historian of theology or philosophy and never claimed to be one.

In *The Courage to Be* Tillich distinguishes three meanings of the term “theism”. I would like to refer only to the third meaning, since the first two are still quite unproblematic, while the third concerns theology itself. In this context Tillich gives two examples of a “bad theology”: first, he mentions a theology, which refers to the so-called arguments for the “existence” of God; second, he refers to a theology “which transforms the person-to-person encounter with God into a doctrine about two persons who may or may not meet but who have a reality independent of each other”.⁹ His explanation of this being “bad theology” reads as follows:

The God of theological theism is a being beside others and as such a part of the whole of reality. ...He is a being, not being-itself. As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. And this is decisive for the necessity of transcending theological theism.¹⁰

Tillich also sees in this third form of theism “the deepest root of atheism”, as Nietzsche stated it.¹¹ Tillich concludes as follows: “Theism in all its forms is transcended in the experience we have

called absolute faith.”¹² Whereby this absolute faith is related to the “God over God”.

At this point let us briefly say something about the arguments of God’s existence: First, Tillich seems to reduce natural theology to the so-called “proofs of God’s existence.” Second he seems to reject them on the one hand because of the Kantian criticism of knowledge, on the other hand because of the “Protestant principle”. It remains to be seen whether he really does justice to this. But when Tillich himself speaks of becoming aware of the divine in the self, the legitimate question arises whether this is not also a form of “natural theology”.

Now I come to the more fundamental problem addressed by Tillich: Which philosophy or theology of rank thinks of God as “a” being—rather than as Being-itself (Thomas Aquinas), the absolute One (Plotin), or the encompassing (Jaspers), to name only a few important positions? This may be the case in popular faith, in fundamentalist or biblical circles, but it is hardly the case with the great thinkers of philosophy and theology. When speaking of the personal God, both, the representatives of the so-called Negative Theology (from Plotin to Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite up to Cusanus) as well as the doctrine of the analogy (cf. Thomas Aquinas) agree that God is not as person as we are persons. As the ground of our personhood he can never be less than a person. On the contrary he must be more than a person. Or which serious theologian really thinks that we can work on God in prayer, as we know that Kant caricatured the prayer of supplication absurdly?

At this point Tillich’s explanations probably remain somewhat too simple and he presents a caricature of theological theism which of course can easily be attacked and rightly rejected. Tillich would have been well advised if he had recalled in this context his own words, which he addressed to Albert Einstein in a 1940 contribution. Here he critically examines Einstein’s rejection of the idea of a personal God. And in this context, he demands that every critic of theology has to deal with theology “with the same fairness which is demanded from everyone who deals, for instance, with physics – namely, to attack the most advanced and not some obsolete forms of a discipline.”¹³ And then Tillich explicitly says:

After Schleiermacher and Hegel had received Spinoza’s doctrine of God as an intrinsic element of any theological doctrine of God, just as the early theologians, Origin and Augustine, had received Plato’s idea of God as an inherent element of their doctrine of God, it became impossible to use the most primitive pattern of the concept of the Personal God in order to challenge the idea itself.¹⁴

Tillich accuses Einstein of exactly what one can accuse him of with regard to the statements mentioned above. As to Tillich Einstein reduces the idea of the personal God to a caricature and thus makes it “a natural object beside others, an object among objects, a being among beings”.¹⁵ To label them with the term “theism” makes things a bit too easy.

If Tillich in his *Systematic Theology* gives the following explanation for the term “personal God,” it differs only in nuances from corresponding explanations of negative theology or analogy doctrine:

‘Personal God’ does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is not less than personal.¹⁶

In this context Tillich also refers to theism when it says here: “Ordinary theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind. ... ‘Personal God’ is a confusing symbol.”¹⁷ Thus Tillich’s criticism here is much more restrained, when speaking of “ordinary” theism—and not in general of “theological” theism as in *The Courage to Be*.

Altogether one has the impression that in *The Courage to Be* the concept of theism for Tillich advances to an argument, for which earlier the concept of supranaturalism usually has served. But both Tillich’s critique of supranaturalism and his critique of theism must be asked whether such a simple form of supranaturalism and theism historically existed at all.

In his article “The God above God” of 1961 Tillich also refers explicitly to his book “The Courage to Be” when it says here:

In my book *The Courage to Be* I have used the phrase ‘The God above God’ within a discussion of radical doubt. The question was: what

can you say to a man, for whom all expressions of religious faith have disappeared in the fire of doubt, but a doubt which is serious and not a cynical play? The answer was: you can take his seriousness as a symptom that something has not disappeared from him, namely the concern about that which concerns man ultimately and for which religion uses the term God. In such concern the God who is absent as an object of faith is present as the source of a restlessness which asks the ultimate question, the question of the meaning of our existence. This God is not seen in a particular image by him who is in doubt about any possible image of God. The absent God, the source of the question and the doubt about himself, is neither the God of theism nor of pantheism; he is neither the God of the Christians nor of the Hindus; he is neither the God of the naturalists nor of the idealists. All these forms of the divine image have been swallowed by the waves of radical doubt. What is left is only the inner necessity of a man to ask the ultimate question with complete seriousness. He himself may not call the source of this inner necessity God. He probably will not. But those who have had a glimpse of the working of the divine Presence, know that one could not even ask the ultimate question without this Present, even if it makes itself felt only as the absence of God. The God above God is a name for God who appears in the radicalism and the seriousness of the ultimate question, even without an answer.”¹⁸

In this article Tillich then addresses in a first chapter under the heading “A Misunderstood Term” those who have misunderstood the term “God over God”. According to Tillich, this term was misunderstood in the sense that it meant the establishment of some kind of “super god” and that at the same time the elimination of the “personal God of living faith” was implied. However, Tillich vehemently contradicts this interpretation here. Rather, he emphasizes, it was about the proof that God is also “the God of those who reject religion” and that he is not bound to the realm of the holy, but that he is also present in the secular realm.¹⁹ Ultimately, Tillich’s fundamental idea of a “theology of culture” is also in the background here.

Once again it becomes clear that “absolute

faith” and the “God over God” are concepts that do not characterize the real experience of faith:

If man were inseparably united with the Ground of his Being, he would be without religion, because he would be in the divine Presence at every moment. Since there would be nothing secular, there would be nothing religious. For him God would indeed be ‘the God above God’.²⁰

But our reality is marked by separation and alienation, and that, as Tillich repeatedly emphasizes, is also the last reason and the last justification for concrete religion.

In a second section of this article, Tillich then investigates the question of why religious images of God are necessary at all, although many people see precisely in them the deepest cause of religious conflicts, which in part have brought unimaginable suffering to mankind. Not least this is the reason why more and more people are turning to Western or Eastern forms of mysticism, especially Zen Buddhism. But according to Tillich there is yet another reason for this interest, which is rooted in the fact that the traditional religious symbols are today always less understood than what they actually want to be, namely reference to the divine. According to Tillich, the term “God over God” can also be helpful with regard to this situation by making clear that these images of God are no “statements about objects” but that they are “genuine symbols in which the power of that to which they point is present.”²¹ Tillich further explicitly states:

The term ‘God above God’ therefore is not meant as a suggestion that one should relinquish the traditional symbols and ascend directly to this transcendent God; but the term is meant as a critical protection against attempts to take the symbols literally and to confuse the images of God with that to which they point, the ultimate in Being and Meaning.²²

Also, in this context Tillich emphasizes again that God is not an object beside other objects, he rather transcends the world of objects as well as every subject. And then it says: “And in so far as the images of God make him into an object they must be transcended.”²³ But is this not destroying the concreteness of religious life and undermining the ego-thou relationship with the personal God?

Or to put it another way: “Does not the God above God supersede the personal God of every living religion, so that no prayer is any longer possible?”²⁴

Tillich responds to this self-objection with the formula already known to us: God is not “a” person as we are persons, but as the “creative source of everything personal in the universe” he cannot be less, but always only “more” than personal. This is also the reason why we are allowed to address him as a person.²⁵ But in this context he treats the theological tradition much more cautiously than we are used to it from his criticism of theism in *The Courage to Be*. For here he says that neither the Bible nor classical theology ever claimed that God was “a” person; rather that was “a poor invention of nineteenth-century theology and even more of popular talk about religion”.²⁶ It is difficult to say who exactly Tillich is thinking of with a view to the theology of the 19th century. He is presumably talking about the so-called late idealists such as Immanuel Hermann Fichte or Christian H. Weiße, who tried to emphasize the personality of God over against Hegel’s pantheistic tendencies.

When Tillich then writes towards the end of this article: “The God above God and the God to whom we can pray are the same God,”²⁷ it becomes clear what is meant by it: It is about what he in “Dynamics of Faith” has described as the two aspects in the idea of God which cannot be separated from each other. This means that there cannot be a religious faith without a concrete element!

¹ Cf. in detail: Werner Schüssler, Paul Tillich’s Schrift „The Courage to Be“ – ein missverstandener Bestseller. Eine kritische Analyse der Begriffe „Theismus“, „absoluter Glaube“ und „Gott über Gott“, in: Christian Danz / Marc Dumas / Werner Schüssler / Bryan Wagoner (eds.), *The Courage to Be* (= International Yearbook for Tillich Research, vol. 13/2018), Berlin/Boston 2018, 109-131.

² MW V 230. – The following abbreviations are used: MW = Paul Tillich, *Main Works / Hauptwerke*, ed. by Carl Heinz Ratschow, 6 vols., Berlin 1987ff.; ST = Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vol., Chicago 1951ff.

³ Christoph Rhein, Paul Tillich. Philosoph und Theologe. Eine Einführung in sein Denken, Stuttgart 1957.

⁴ Ibid., 111 note 27. – My translation!

⁵ ST II 12. – Emphasis mine!

⁶ The printed versions all have here: “The risk to faith ...” This is a misreading of Tillich’s handwritten manuscript!

⁷ MW V, 239f. – Emphasis mine!

⁸ MW V, 278. – My translation!

⁹ MW V 227.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Paul Tillich, *Science and Theology: A Discussion with Einstein*, in Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. by Robert C. Kimball, New York 1959, 129.

¹⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

¹⁵ Ibid., 130.

¹⁶ ST I 245.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ MW VI 417f.

¹⁹ MW VI 418.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ MW VI 419.

²² MW VI 419f.

²³ MW VI 420.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

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