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EXISTENCE AS THE QUESTION OF FAITH:
TILlich'S EXISTENTIAL REORIENTATION
OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

A b s t r a c t. Through a close reading of Paul Tillich this article argues that the human being asks questions because its existence is a question, pensive concern with the meaning of its own being. A chief task, then, is to explicate the impossibility of absolute despair and absolute apathy. Even despair and doubt witness to a concern with meaning insofar as it mourns its absence. In this respect, every person has a 'god,' namely something regarded as holy, something concerning the individual ultimately or, in Tillich's terms, an object of ultimate concern. Even the atheist who dedicates her life to refuting belief in God testifies to this as her ultimate concern. Ultimate concern is thus Tillich's definition of faith: subjection to the holy. The author convincingly shows that faith, the question of and ultimate concern with the holy, is the primary phenomenon constituting human existence as a human person. Faith is the condition of personhood.

Key words: Tillich; existence; person; faith; God.

The god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god.

– Martin Heidegger¹

Paul Tillich analyzes the so-called proofs of the existence of God not as arguments but only in order to ascertain what exactly it is they seek. Accord-

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¹ From *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 72.

ding to him, the traditional arguments for God's existence are phenomenologically explicable as formulations of the *question* of God. It will be argued that for Tillich the question of God is an existential, the primary existential of human existence, manifesting itself in the phenomenon of faith. This phenomenon, Tillich claims, is what constitutes human existence as personal.

I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTION

The question of God need not become thematic by appearing before consciousness in a discursive, linguistic form, but it can be experienced in a more fundamental way without ever having to be explicitly formulated, because it is implicitly *lived*. Questions posed thematically may be asked in a merely theoretical way with little existentiell² significance for the person asking the question. Instead, as John Macquarrie might suggest, the question of existence can be called a "religious question", a question posed "by the whole being of man" ("How" 187). The question that existence itself is, then, exceeds encapsulation by its various formulations.

A. *Questions imply a "have" and "have not"*

Who is able to ask this question, because they are this question? Questions are always asked with a direction, i.e. they are *about* something. This presupposes that the asker already has at least a partial grasp of what the asking is about; the asker would otherwise not be able to ask about *it*. The asker cannot be radically isolated from the answer; the asker must already "have" the answer in some sense.³ If the question is in reference to God, as it is here, then the questioner must already have some *idea* of God, which does not speak to the actual *existence* of God, only to the *conception* of God.

² The terms "existentiell" and "existential" are used in the sense Martin Heidegger gives to them, who clearly exerted an influence on Tillich's thought. An existential is not a Kantian category of transcendental subjectivity but a structure of human existence, a structure of being-in-the-world. The existentiell refers not to universally pertinent structures of existence but to concrete experiences that influence the meaning of a person's particular existence. The term "existence" is shorthand for the being of the human being as a question. Ex-istence implies that one is estranged, yet retaining some contact with that from which one is estranged.

³ The idea of fore-having (*Vorhaben*) involved in the asking of a question stems from Heidegger. See *Being and Time*.

Is this question-begging? If the asker already has the answer, even if only partially, then what is the purpose of the question? If the question is to have a purpose, then, although already being partially united with the answer, the asker must also be estranged⁴ from the answer. In some sense, the questioner must also not have the answer. Tillich plastically remarks, "He who asks the question has and has not at the same time" (Tillich, *Biblical*, 11). The polarities of having and not-having are not contradictory, but this polarity only indicates that the questioner only has the answer partially or only has a faint remembrance of thing asked about, driving the questioner to seek reconciliation from her estrangement or partiality, driving the estranged questioner to seek for the whole answer, for a more immediate relation. The questioner is always in a tension between these polarities, i.e. the questioner can neither be radically or absolutely separated from the answer nor made identical with it.

Who is able to ask questions? What type of reality exists as essentially related to that which it questions while yet remaining estranged from it? This, Tillich argues, can only be the human person. A fuller description of what fundamentally characterizes the human as a person must await further analysis. For now, however, let it be assumed that as conscious and free a human being is with the whole of reality or, in a Heideggerian register, has as one of its existential structures being-in-the-world without being determined by the world as a mere part or a mere mechanism, thus fulfilling the dual requirements of union and separation both. As Tillich contends in this respect, "Man is by nature a philosopher, because he inescapably asks the question of being" (*Biblical*, 9). One is never a serene purveyor of being (even the philosopher), but always thrown into it. Let this thus stand as the preliminary definition of human being: the human is she whose nature is such that she is able to ask the question of being because she *is* the question of being.

⁴ Tillich uses the term "estrangement" to characterize the relation to God. A person belongs to God insofar as she is dependent, yet she is separated from God insofar as she is also independent. Estrangement carries with it the connotation that one is separated from something that one once knew or to which one once belonged. One can be born in exile but one *becomes* estranged. Tillich uses "estrangement" because "it contains the imagery of the stranger and the separation of people who once loved each other and belong essentially to each other" (*History*, 420).

B. *The form(s) of the question*

Although it has already been stated that the human – if able to be the question – does not need to pose questions thematically in order to *be* the question, this essay must nevertheless formulate the question for methodological purposes. If the foregoing is correct, then the various possible forms or ways of posing the question are nothing more than manifestations of the *one* question that human existence is. Likewise, though there are many variations of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, they are usually – with ontological arguments constituting exceptions – an attempt to derive that which is ultimate in terms of causality, in particular in terms of the four-fold theory of causation of Aristotle. This essay too will take its departure from Aristotle’s four-fold account, analyzing its use in the so-called arguments for the existence of God, not with the intent of analyzing their validity but, as Tillich repeatedly insists, in order to decipher what they are asking about. This will enable one to see if these questions are indeed fundamental to human existence. Aristotelian causation consists of form, matter, efficiency/agency and final causation. The first two are co-present or atemporal while the second two have a temporal structure.

Of these four, material causation is not so mysteriously absent in the traditional arguments for God’s existence. There are good reasons for this. The human is a temporal being and as such asks her questions according to a temporal structure, but Aristotelian matter bears a unique relation to temporality. For anything to be actual and temporal it must have a material principle, a principle of individuation. It does not, however, have to be this thing or that particular thing; it only has to have a determinate limitation as such to be *a* thing. Logically speaking, matter always involves contingency, i.e. although it possesses conditional necessity in regards to actuality, it is still always on the side of potentiality. There must be a material principle in all actuality but it does not have to be manifested in any certain way. As Schelling, once said, “The determinate limitation cannot be determined through limitation as such...[which means]...*that it is the one thing that philosophy can neither conceive nor explain*” (*System*, 59). This means that given determinate limitations, i.e. the way material causation qua principle of individuation manifests itself, are something that cannot be explained but only described. The contingent limitations must be positively accepted. Therefore, the following analyses of the so-called arguments for the existence of God, which aim at a necessary rather than contingent God, will correspond to formal, efficient and final causation, which, for Tillich, parallels certain ontological,

cosmological and moral arguments respectively. Remember that these will not actually be analyzed in terms of an argument but in terms of questions, i.e. the arguments are “expressions of the *question* of God which is implied in human finitude” (Tillich, *Volume I*, 205). More specifically, the attempt is, as one Tillichian commentator puts it, to explain how “the Ontological Argument shows that the question of God is possible...(and)...the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments show that the question of God is necessary” (Thomas, *Tillich*, 80).

II. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

While the other so-called arguments usually conclude to a First Cause, First Mover or Final Cause, Mover, Perfection etc., the ontological argument is different. Instead of arguing for something at the beginning or end of a temporal chain it seeks an unconditioned ground, traditionally phrased as “that than which nothing greater can be thought”, and this is identified with God. The crucial step in this argument, most famously found in St. Anselm’s *Proslogion*, is that such a being must exist inside and outside of the mind, i.e. intra-mentally and extra-mentally. In other words, that which one really seeks is that which can overcome skepticism by guaranteeing a connection between mind and reality, the intra-mental and extra-mental. The ontological argument is in search of that which is the possibility of truth and hence the *possibility* of asking about God or anything at all in a meaningful way. Without that which transcends the cleavage between inside and outside, mind and world, subject and object etc., the search after God (or anything) is futile. What the ontological argument demands is that which makes thought *possible*, the connection between the *logos*-structure of the world and the *logos*-structure of thought. The ontological argument makes the *question* of God *possible*, which thus belies, says Tillich, that the argument is actually “the rational description of the relation of our mind to Being as such” (Tillich, “Two” 5).

A. *Revelation of the Absolute*

If the ontological argument seeks the *possibility* of truth, then it cannot merely be satisfied with an accidental coincidence between subject and object; for, any coincidence of subject and object that does not at the same time

reveal the necessary connection between the two is always subject to doubt. This would mean that certitude is still not possible and skepticism still not overcome. The possibility of truth, in other words, lies not where subject and object are joined because they *happen* to be “in the same place”, but the possibility of truth lies where subject and object belong together *essentially*, where they are not yet separated, where they are originally one and not a consequent synthesis. The argument, *per* Tillich, is but one expression of the human being’s desire to find the absolute condition of truth, the unity of thinking and being.

R.G. Collingwood refers to this as the “presupposed condition of truth”, an absolute presupposition (as opposed to a relative one), which is a presupposition that is empirically unverifiable because it is itself the pre-condition for empirical verities. Collingwood informs his readers that “the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply to absolute presuppositions at all, that distinction being peculiar to propositions” (*Essay* 32). Consequently, this presupposed condition is beyond the distinction between truth and falsity insofar as it is the very ground of both, that which makes such a distinction possible; it is truth itself.

The identity between subject and object sought after in the ontological argument is an identity of indifference, a term Tillich borrows from Schelling. This undifferentiated unity is the unconditioned Absolute. The ontological argument reveals the unconditioned condition of truth, the Absolute, but not by demonstration, because one cannot argue from *a* truth to the possibility of that very truth. Rather, Tillich contends, it was revealed only insofar as the ontological argument is actually “a phenomenological description of the human mind, insofar as the human mind by necessity points to something beyond subjectivity and objectivity and points to the experience of truth... [which]...presupposes that the subject which knows the truth and the object which is known are in some way in one and the same place” (Tillich, *History*, 164). In short, for Tillich, humans participate in the Absolute, that which transcends the cleavage between subjectivity and objectivity and makes particular truths possible.⁵

⁵ In Heideggerian language that which makes particular truths-in-the-world possible is “ontological truth.”

B. *Revelation of the possibility of the question*

It is only a short logical step from the discovery of the Absolute to the possibility – not yet necessity – of the *question* (not the *actuality*) of God. Ontologically speaking, the discovery of this unconditional element in the human being, or rather the human being in it, shows the possibility of truth, which means that human beings can ask the question of the Absolute with the hope of an answer. By itself, though, this does not mean that the answer to all questions will prove to be true. For example, if the question concerning the Absolute is posed explicitly, on the level of discursive thought, it becomes problematic and paradoxical; it cannot be experienced in this way. “Existentially” this question can and is asked all the time, even if one is unaware of it. Tillich’s contention is that the ontological argument proves to be “the rational description of the relation of our mind to Being as such” (Tillich, “Two” 5). The *question* of God is possible because the human being bears a possible relation to its reality, *whatever* sort of reality it might be; the human being is not *radically* separated from it, thus satisfying the first structure of the question, the “have.”

One must further explicate, however, what it means to say that the ontological argument makes the question of God formally *possible* for the human being, implying that in itself it is not a question of God, neither a lived question nor a theoretical one. With regards to the Absolute as it is revealed in the ontological argument, the human being “is not subjected to doubt, which is possible only if subjectivity and objectivity are separated. Psychologically...doubt is possible; but logically, the Absolute is affirmed by the very act of doubt, because it is implied in every statement about the relation between subject and object” (Tillich, “Two” 4). Logically, doubt is not possible in reference to the Absolute because subject and object are one. The possibility of psychological doubt in the last quote can only then mean one of two things: either it is in reference to propositions about the world and things in the world, or it is in reference to existential doubt, i.e. doubt about the meaning of one’s being.

Existential doubt about the meaning of one’s being concerns more than just the coincidence of some random object with a subject; it is not epistemic doubt. Tillich claims that existential doubt implies existential risk, which is “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” (“Two” 13). When this doubt becomes wrapped up with the meaning of our being we have entered the moral realm and are no longer merely in the ontological and

theoretical realm. Also, doubt, be it existential or theoretical, always becomes manifest only in something concrete, something in existence, even if its ground is ontological and not ontic.⁶

Even if God would be identified with the Absolute, the question of God still cannot arise on the ontological level alone because there is no-*thing* to be asked about. Yet, the Absolute does provide the possibility of the question. The ontological argument reveals the possibility of the question by virtue of the fact that it reveals the Absolute, the *prius* of thought, but, as the *prius* of thought, it is incapable of being thought or asked about directly. The ontological question is always a mediated one, even though the ontological relation to the Absolute is immediate. For the question to become manifest there must be a concrete bearer or vicar, if one will, of the question. Ontologically speaking, the human being has an immediate relation to the Absolute, though the relation itself can only be cognitively approached mediately. The human being is in the Absolute but is also separate from it. To repeat, then: the analysis of the ontological argument has satisfied both polarities of the question, the “have” and the “have not”, making the question possible in the first place.

III. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The ontological argument showed the *formal* possibility of the question of God, but not its *material* necessity. It is in the other forms of arguments for God’s existence, those utilizing efficient and final causation, that Tillich suggests the question becomes an unavoidable one. Each will be analyzed in terms of an existentiell or religious question, a lived question. It may be possible that the explicit question is never formulated while the “lived question” is nevertheless efficacious and even necessary.

A. *How the question must be asked*

The cosmological question can be asked in two ways: Ontically – “Why is there *this* world?” – or ontologically – “Why is there a world at all?”

⁶ The distinction between the ontological and the ontic is also intended in the Heideggerian sense.

(1) “Why is there *this* world?” This is always an empirical question that asks why *this* world is and why it is the way that it is. Its answer will always be preliminary and incomplete. It may be able to explain physical relations, but not their absolute origin. This way of posing the questions operates on the level of the problematic and never the mysterious.⁷ Posing the question at the level of the problematic is not religious. Instead, as Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, “It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists” (*Tractatus*, 6.44). It is to this question concerning the facticity of the world as such to which attention must now be turned.

(2) “Why a world at all?” This ontological question itself runs in two directions. First, it can be asked efficiently, i.e. it can ask about the “beginning” of the world, about the first or uncaused cause. The second way of asking this question will actually be dealt with once the teleological argument, considered morally, is the item of discussion. It asks about the meaning of the world, the purpose of the world. It asks if the world has any meaning and what time and history are moving towards, if anything. At this juncture, however, only the first formulation, in terms of efficient causation, will be posed.

B. *Is it unavoidable?*

Obviously there is no necessity that the efficient formulation of the cosmological question be asked explicitly in a speculative manner. Very often it is of course, for example, often when one speaks with a theologian or philosopher, or every time a child asks where the world came from or where God came from, and there are probably even traces of the cosmological question when children ask where babies come from. However empirically justified one may seem to be in asserting the universality of this question, one it is nevertheless impossible to show its explicit necessity on philosophical grounds. It is always possible that the explicit formulation, “Whence did it all come?” will never come to consciousness for certain individuals.

Is this question implicit though? Is it an existential of human existence, a lived question, even if for some it may never come to mind in a theoretical way? Tillich seems to think so anyway, as he writes, “The question of God

⁷ This distinction between the problematic and the mysterious is meant to be reminiscent of Gabriel Marcel.

must be asked because the threat of nonbeing, which man experiences as anxiety, drives him to the question of being conquering non-being...This is the cosmological question of God” (*Volume I*, 208). Tillich is thus correct only if, in turn, it can be shown that anxiety is universal and Tillich would make this contention. He is convinced that anxiety is always there, although repressed in some, because anxiety is manifest in the confrontation with one’s own finitude, i.e. it becomes manifest in the confrontation with non-being. Following this line of thought, one might readily admit that, on the one hand, everyone has this experience to some degree – though clearly more pronounced in some than others – and not just that everyone experiences it but perhaps even that they must, that it is an existential and therefore unavoidable as something at least implicit in other questions and activities of human existence. On the other hand, in *dealing* with one’s own finitude, one often does this in a teleological rather than in an efficient/cosmological way. Tillich is likely at least partially correct insofar as he asserts that anxiety is the symptom of the question of why there is being rather than non-being, something rather than nothing. One is indeed anxious when confronted with one’s finitude and possible non-existence, but this is *not* merely a cosmological question, which asks *from* which ground/cause the world came to be; it is also a teleological question, which asks *for* what reason the world is at all, i.e. for what purpose, and to what end being resists non-being. Why, for what end, does the world not just fall back into the nothingness from which it came? The question seeks after the purpose of the world or, better, why it is better to be than not to be, why it is not rather better that there would have always been nothing instead of something. In short, it is more a question of whither than whence, of destination than origination. The cosmological question of “Why?” or “On the basis of what ground?” is implicit in the question of “What for?” This is because in asking for the “what for” of the world one is also inquiring back into its origin. Both questions seek the *raison d’être* of the world. There is thus a close relationship between the efficient/cosmological and teleological/moral questions; the two cannot be absolutely separated. Nevertheless, the cosmological question, as a lived question, is only unavoidable if the moral question is. It is difficult to see how the cosmological question itself, apart from its teleological pole, would be necessary. The question, posed morally, is the more significant question for human persons. All the same, the division of the cosmological and teleological questions is artificial as each at least implies the other.

By denying the necessity of the explicit or formulated question of God as it is given in the cosmological argument one cannot thereby conclude that

a first cause, the *ens realissimum*, is or is not necessary, only that it need not necessarily become manifest as a speculative question for human beings. In fact, if one merely poses cosmological questions without moral or teleological import, then it risks simply becoming a theological or academic question divorced from concrete religiosity, i.e. it risks losing existentiell significance.

IV. THE MORAL ARGUMENT

The analysis of the Moral Argument as the prime exemplar of the teleological approach to God requires a prefatory remark. Morality means neither a list of rights and wrongs, nor does it reveal any *particular* prescription whatsoever. Tillich instead conceives of morality as “the constitution of the bearer of the spirit, the centered person” (Tillich, *Morality*, 17). This implies that there is really only one moral imperative, “to become a person” (ibidem, 20). In the Tillichian sense the moral life of the human person is not about conformity to a code or adherence to a particular demand, but it is primarily one’s concern about the meaning of life, a question about whether it is better to be or not to be. The following Tillichian analysis, then, is thus a phenomenological study of moral life, not a derived list of moral obligations. Traditional moral arguments for the existence of God have been arguments *from* morality, arguing for God’s existence on the basis of the existence of right and wrong. This would certainly not be the Socratic response to the Euthyphro Dilemma, as this line of argumentation instead postulates God as an arbitrary rule-giver and/or reward-giver in order to explain the existence of morality. Here, however, the attempt will neither be to pose the question of God in a way that makes God a postulate of practical reason in a way similar to the Kantian approach nor to posit God as the source of ethical dictates. Ethics does not first require a theology for its foundation, though it may be true that ethical questions always approach as a limit the question of the good of being, i.e. whether being ought to continue to triumph over non-being.

A. All “*teloi*” are grounded in “*telos*” as such

The thesis analyzed here is Tillich’s proposition that, “The *prius* of every individual comprehension of meaning is the unconditioned meaning itself” (*Sciences*, 183). In order to interpret what this might mean recourse will be

made to an argument of Schubert Ogden, found in his book, *The Reality of God*.⁸ Ogden's argument is that even the staunchest defenders of atheism (the two he focuses on are Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) are witnesses to ultimacy in meaning. As Ogden says, "The object of philosophical theology would not be the divine 'existence' (*Existenz*), but, in some sense of the word, the divine 'existentiality' (*Existenzialität*), the basic structure or essence that determines 'the godness of God'" (*Reality*, 148).⁹ He argues that atheism, understood not as a doctrine but as an existential comportment, is impossible and that faith, which he understands in terms of a Heideggerian existential, in something is necessary, because by bestowing meaning on anything everybody implicitly witnesses to a transcendent source of meaning itself and this one calls God. Ogden probably errs in persisting on naming this source "transcendent", with its implication of a hither-world or noumenal realm. His insight should rather be read to mean that one cannot find meaning "in" the world or in any particular objects in the world unless one, even if only implicitly, acknowledges the significance of the world as such, namely, that it is better that it is rather than that it is not. It is this abyss of value, goodness and meaning saturating the facticity of the world, that it is there rather than not, which determines the "godness of God." Ogden writes, "If all our moral thought and action rest on an underlying confidence in the final meaning of life, then we are implicitly affirming such confidence...in all that we think and do" (*ibidem*, 40). Ogden attempts to apply this argument to Camus and Sartre to show that even they witness to some God even as God is verbally denied. Again, the question is not about the reality of God but about the question of God and what it reveals about the meaning of God. Initially, Ogden's application seems accurate enough, as Camus himself says,

⁸ Ogden presents a process view of God differing from Tillich. The difference, however, is not incommensurable. Tyron Inbody, for one, has written an article, "Tillich and Process Theology", *Theological Studies* 36(1975), 1: 472-492. illustrating many similarities between Tillich and process theology. Tillich himself has said that he is "not disinclined to accept the process-character of being-itself" ("Reply", 339) and that he feels a "close affinity to the philosophy of religion represented by Mr. Hartshorne" (*ibidem*, 340), who is also a process thinker. Charles Hartshorne in turn has said, "I acclaim (Tillich) as (a) 'dipolar' theist or 'panentheist'" (Hartshorne, 166). Given the similarities between process thought and Tillichian thought, the recourse to Ogden is appropriate.

⁹ Tillich's idea of divinity or what constitutes the "godness of God" is similar. "It is the element of the unconditional and of ultimacy" (*Dynamics*, 10). By itself this seems to imply only what is unconditional and ultimate ontologically but, as will be seen, for Tillich, what is ontologically unconditional and ultimate is also teleologically unconditional and ultimate, and thereby "the Holy."

“True despair is agony, tomb, or abyss. If it speaks, analyzes, especially if it writes...love is born. A literature of despair is a contradiction in terms” (“Riddle”, 85). The only way for one to fail to witness to a source of meaning is absolute despair, which Camus says is a contradiction in terms. Sartre will even say, “The being of the self: it is value” (*Being*, 143). Both of Ogden’s exemplar cases witness to a source of meaning, but is it really an unconditioned ground of meaning itself as the Tillichian quote suggests or a transcendent source as Ogden suggests? One must surely reject Ogden’s view, at least according to the letter. Sartre, for example, finds the ground of meaning in the self. Projects, for Sartre, are fundamentally individual, not in the sense of a-sociality but insofar as one does not find oneself enchanted by a project as already bearing meaning in itself, but one rather “posits” one’s own projects and thereby posits value into an otherwise valueless or absurd world. The claim that a witness to something of ultimacy in meaning implicitly witnesses to the ontological ground of meaning itself may perhaps be true, but such cannot be concluded from Ogden’s analysis. What may be concluded is simply that all meanings witness to some source of meaning, even if this is only the self as a creator of value, which value each takes to be ultimate (see the discussion of ultimate concern below) and so may be referred to as the person’s “God.” Note, for example, phrases like, “Money is her God.” Whatever one takes to be of ultimate value is a fundamental source of value for that person and this many call “God.”

B. *Is the question unavoidable?*

For Tillich the teleological *question* of God is unavoidable (although the teleological *argument* may be fallacious and/or unsound), even if it is not actually recognized as a question of God. Doubt may perhaps be the fundamental way this question manifests itself in order to reveal its universal pervasiveness, which in turn reveals the primary phenomenon in the life of a person under the heading of the holy – faith.

(1) “Doubt as a form of the question.” When pondering this issue one is reminded of Kierkegaard’s notion of the comical. For Kierkegaard, the idea of the absolutely objective thinker, particularly in the realms of ethics and religion, is comical because if the individual were wholly objective, if she were absolutely detached subjectively, then even if she found the truth, she could not care or even be disappointed with failure. Any emotion hinged upon success and failure would invalidate the subjective detachment of the

individual. As Camus has already asserted, “True despair is agony, tomb, or abyss. If it speaks, analyzes, especially if it writes...love is born. A literature of despair is a contradiction in terms” (“Riddle”, 85). Only someone capable of absolute despair can say that there is no meaning in life – though they could not possibly care enough to say as much. Moreover, one could not even call it despair, as that word carries emotive connotations. Only one capable of absolute apathy could claim absolute indifference in regards to the meaning of life. Doubt, even doubt about a God, can witness to that God as the *condition sine qua non* of meaning in one’s life. As seen above when the ontological argument was the item of discussion, the doubt of the skeptic implied in the search for the “first certitude” is precisely that which made the question of God possible. Concerning the so-called teleological argument, or so Tillich claims, it can now be seen that existential, rather than cognitive, doubt shows that the question is unavoidable. Doubt is a symptom of the desire for truth and if truth is desired, then it is taken to be meaningful; doubt presupposes meaning. Doubt is a form of concern, perhaps even the most radical form. Doubt about God is an expression of ultimate concern, which is what Tillich calls faith, namely, the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern. As one commentator of Tillich has written, “Existential doubt can be an expression of ultimate concern with truth and with the quest for the Holy” (Thompson, 55). A fuller discussion of ultimate concern and faith will be provided shortly, but first one must see what doubt says about the possibility of atheism.

(2) “The possibility and impossibility of atheism.” Obviously, atheism is and always will remain a real possibility in the sense that God(s) can always be verbally denied. The question is whether one who discards the word “God” will inevitably refer to an inexorable source of meaning under a different rubric. According to Tillich, God, i.e. that which concerns one ultimately, can neither be proved nor disproved, but God is rather revealed or not revealed. It follows that the possibility of atheism is not about what is objectively the case as much as it is about what a phenomenological analysis of the human person brings to light. In other words, the question is not whether there is or is not a being called God, but whether it is possible for the human person to live as though there is no God, as though one does not witness to some ultimate source of meaning, i.e. a source of ultimacy. This means that one can verbally deny God(s), while still “existentially” witnessing, though unwittingly, to a source of inviolable meaning, i.e. holiness. In fact, the denial of God, when raised to a level of absolute, unsurpassed seriousness, is

itself a kind of witness to that God as the most holy, despite the fact that its reality is denied.

That God can be acknowledged in the very denial of God is a view shared both by Tillich and Ogden; for, Tillich says, "Atheism...remains unconcerned about the meaning of one's existence" (*Dynamics*, 45) and "their seriousness in trying to be atheists witnesses against their claim to be atheists" ("God Above", 419). Anybody can verbally deny God, but nobody can existentially deny God, i.e. live as if there is no God, as though nothing was holy. Absolute despair is death.

The conclusion that doubt can be a witness to God, a witness to an ultimate concern, and, accordingly, that a lived atheism is impossible, has perhaps already been belabored, but it is important. It arose from an analysis of moral life – in Tillich's sense and not as a science of prescription – and is expressed in certain moral arguments for God's existence, although in a fallacious way. The question of God is ubiquitous, even if it is never discursively formulated. The so-called atheist has obviously asked the question explicitly but concludes that there is no God. She has likely failed to take into account what she regards as ultimate and holy, the holy being that which grasps the person as a matter of ultimate concern. The one thus grasped, the one seized by an ultimate concern, is said to be in a state of faith.

To conclude the discussion of doubt, one might say that Descartes should not have concluded "*Dubito ergo sum*" but rather more clumsily concluded "I doubt, therefore I witness to a source of meaning defining me as the I that I am, otherwise I would not care enough to doubt." Doubt implies concern and existential doubt is about what is most meaningful for one; doubt is a manifestation of ultimate concern. What, however, is ultimate concern?

C. *Ultimate concern as faith*

Ultimate concern has two parts: First, it is a concern and, second, it is a concern of ultimate importance. It has a subjective and an objective side. The subjective side is that one is concerned about something; it is the *concerning*, the act of being concerned. Concern in its formal structure – even when manifest as doubt – is similar to the Heideggerian notion of *Sorge* (care). The objective side is that *about which* one is concerned, which always assumes a role of ultimacy or utmost importance for the subject – holiness. Ultimate concern is concern that takes precedence over all preliminary concerns. John

Robinson, a controversial advocate of Tillich, distinguished ultimate concern from proximate concern, calling proximate concerns those at “the level at which scientific statements, etc. are true” (“Debate”, 253). Non-ultimate concerns have a preliminary character and are a means to an end, to a greater concern. Ultimate concerns claim that the content of the concern is to be valued of its own accord; nothing can be more holy than it. This is what Gabriel Marcel called the hyperdoxical, claiming, “Where an intrinsic value is defended...we are in the realm of the hyperdoxical” (Marcel, 126).¹⁰ Eventually, it will be suggested that a human being’s ultimate concern constitutes the defining characteristic of one’s persona.

Subjectively speaking, the idea of an ultimate concern is a purely formal one and not a categorical one. There are no concerns that one may have that would enable another to say, “That is an ultimate concern” or “That is not an ultimate concern.” There is nothing about a concern that allows it to be categorized as an ultimate concern; it is only the role the concern plays in relation to the subject that makes it ultimate.¹¹ This is why one must distinguish the structure of ultimate concern from its content. The content of a concern can in no way betray that for some individual it is operative as an ultimate concern. Even self-proclaimed theists could believe in a God who is not actually the object of their ultimate concern, just as atheists could have the question of God as an ultimate concern.¹²

Why is ultimate concern a suitable definition for faith? Why are all in a state of faith? Why, according to Tillich, is faith the central phenomenon constituting the person – or more specifically their persona – and how can one differentiate between true and false faith? Faith is defined by Tillich as

¹⁰ The imagery of the hyperdoxical leaves open the possibility that the relation between ultimate and proximate concerns transcends that of a figure/ground relationship, meaning that the object of ultimate concern may be that which can never properly be reduced to the level of an object, a figure with a ground, at all.

¹¹ As an object of faith, an ultimate concern can be idolatrous, meaning that one’s ultimate concern is not about what is truly ultimate (ontologically), but this is to approach ultimate concern from its objective pole. A concern can reflect what is or is not ontologically ultimate, but whether or not the *concerning* itself is ultimate has nothing to do with the character of that about which one is concerned. Even the ontologically ultimate, the Absolute, can be approached with a purely detached attitude. This relating pertains to the subjective side of ultimate concern.

¹² This means that the content of an ultimate concern need not really exist, objectively speaking, for it to be of ultimate concern for the subject.

“the state of being ultimately concerned” (*Dynamics*, 1).¹³ Faith is a state of being ultimately concerned *by* that about which one is concerned. One does not grasp faith; its object takes hold of the subject. The object of faith grasps the subject and one either welcomes its hold or rebels against it, but one never spontaneously assents to it in the way that one may be able to freely choose to or not to engage in certain rituals.

Being grasped by an ultimate concern is an adequate definition of faith because it attests to the aspect of the givenness of faith and because faith, according to Tillich, *ought* to be about that which is ultimate not just in holiness or in the phenomenological sense but also ultimate in divinity or in the ontological sense. In short, Tillich hopes that what concerns one absolutely will be the Absolute itself, thus satisfying the condition of ultimacy both in meaning and being, religiously and theologically, existentially and ontologically. This and only this does Tillich want to call “true faith.” Nevertheless, a genuine faith in what is ontologically ultimate, the Absolute, must always be mediated by something concrete. More often than not, in fact, the person in a state of genuine faith is likely not discursively aware that their faith is based on what is ontologically ultimate.

As the phenomenological definition of faith – rather than the ontological object of faith – everything that is true of ultimate concern is also true of faith. Just as doubt can be a symptom of ultimate concern, it is also a symptom of faith.¹⁴ Likewise, just as one necessarily witnesses to a source of meaning, so one necessarily has an ultimate concern and, accordingly, one is necessarily in a state of faith – though the object of faith can be different from person to person. Everybody is in a state of faith, lest they could not be a person. Tillich affirms, “Personality is not possible without faith” (*Dynamics*, 20). A person’s faith is the faith that it is because it is the manifestation of that individual’s ultimate concern, which provides their center, their ultimate source of meaning and significance. All other non-ultimate concerns receive their relevance in the light of the ultimate concern. If these concerns are termed proximate, peripheral or tangential, then they are proximate to

¹³ This definition of faith is similar to his definition of religion as “the self-transcendence of the spirit toward what is ultimate and unconditioned in being and meaning” (*Morality*, 18). Tillich himself will actually say that they are the same, but there is at least one crucial difference. The definition of faith is formal, saying nothing of faith’s content, only that it represents an ultimate meaning, but the definition of religion stipulates that the faith is directed toward what actually is ultimate in being *and* meaning. Religion, then, would be *true* faith.

¹⁴ “Serious doubt is confirmation of faith. It indicates the seriousness of the concern” (*Dynamics*, 22).

something that is used as a point of reference, the ultimate concern as the center. If these less-than-ultimate concerns are termed preliminary, then they are preliminary to a primary, more pressing concern. Without an ultimate concern, all other concerns have no relevance, they have no hierarchy; the person would be in a state of *pólemos* (war), a house divided against itself. A prime example of this can be seen in those with split or multiple personalities. What is actually happening though is not that one person has many personalities. Rather, there are many persons, each demarcated from the other by virtue of their conflicting ultimate concerns. The integration of a split-personality into a unitary one, according to the Tillichian model, would actually be nothing more than the subordination of competing ultimate concerns to the level of preliminary concerns under the predominance of *one* ultimate concern. The present objective, however, is not to offer a psychological analysis of the self but to elucidate the nature of faith as the primary existential of the human person, manifest and yet hidden in the traditional arguments for the existence of God. The task is also to show why the question of God, insofar as this question is a manifestation of faith, is a universal phenomenon, i.e. an existential of human existence. *Per* Tillich, no particular faith is universal but faith as such is, lest human existence be less than personal. All people have faith – though some may live without institutional creeds – and is the person that one is because of the content of their faith, even for the Sartrean person.

Faith is necessary for the formation of the person. As Tillich claims, “Being without (faith) is being without a center...A human being deprived completely of a center would cease to be a human being” (*Dynamics*, 106). One’s God could be idolatrous¹⁵ and consequently the object of their faith could be self-destructive. While every faith witnesses to a source of meaning, the hyperdoxical, not all faiths do so explicitly or cognizantly. Faith in that which can truly be called God can be latent but not yet manifest in idolatrous faiths.

Until now the discussion of faith has taken place entirely under the heading of the moral argument and rightfully so. Again, the moral, for Tillich, has nothing to do, at least originally, with a prescriptive and normative moral code. The moral has to do with the determination of the self in the objective world, i.e. with persona, but not in such a way that the particular determina-

¹⁵ Idolatry is synonymous with unfaith or disbelief. It occurs when one’s ultimate concern is of such a nature that it destroys the person’s autonomy by heteronomously, i.e. tyrannically, wielding control over the subject.

tion is prescribed by reason or a lawgiver. Explicit discussion of the moral argument has fallen from view, but it was always there and it should be abundantly clear that within the moral argument the question about the ground of morality itself resides, i.e. the ground of what makes personhood possible, the question of holiness. Teleological arguments for God's existence all fail. What is needed, however, is not a syllogism anyway but an analysis that brings the phenomenon of faith to the fore. The train of thought passed through the following steps: First, through an analysis of doubt, particularly the doubt of so-called atheists, it was noted that any telic activity implied a telic source that seizes one as ultimate. Second, this, in turn, revealed the alleged universality of ultimate concern, which Tillich explicates as faith, being careful to distinguish the structure of faith from its content. Consequently, the conclusion Tillich draws is that faith is necessary. Summarily, then, the formal causation of the ontological argument reveals the *possibility* of the quest for truth and the quest for God, as Truth itself, while the final causation of the moral argument reveals the universality *actuality* of the same (while presupposing the efficient or cosmological question as one of its possible expressions). Faith, for Tillich, can now clearly be seen *not* to be "a phenomenon beside others, but the central phenomenon in man's personal life...its existence is necessary and universal. Any denial of faith is itself an expression of faith, of an ultimate concern" (*Dynamics*, 126-127).¹⁶

V. WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

The primary task of elaborating Tillich's depiction of human existence *as* a question, the question of faith, has been accomplished, but what exactly does Tillich pose as the answer to the question of faith? In short, he suggests that it is an ultimate concern with the holy, with an object that is also ontologically ultimate, i.e. divine. Yet, how shall this, the divine, be conceived? This question cannot be answered in full – which would require an exposition

¹⁶ Faith is similar to love insofar as one "falls" in love and does not arbitrarily posit an object of love. Everything in one's world becomes centered around the object or person one loves to the extent that the death of a loved one is also a loss of one's world and self. However, while everyone is in a state of faith, not everybody must be in love. The difference might be that love presupposes a good, whereas one's faith may be completely idolatrous. In an idolatrous faith one may be controlled by a drive for destruction and separation, namely, hate, which is the opposite of love, which is a drive for creation and re-union. Only true faith necessarily entails love.

of his account of God as being itself – but in the space that remains it will at least be possible to explain in more detail the distinction between true and false faith, i.e. between absolute faith and idolatry or disbelief. True faith is a faith that has the answer in some way, while disbelief or idolatry remains estranged from the answer to existence.

A. *Absolute faith*

Absolute faith heals. It brings salvation, *salvus*. The opposite brings destruction and alienation. Absolute faith is able to create a center in the person that is strong enough to overcome the idolatrous attack of preliminary concerns.¹⁷ It is in this sense that absolute faith heals. A faith that is absolute, as opposed to relative, is also one that can be universally and not just locally shared by others, thus necessarily drawing one into communion with others, without at the same time nullifying one's individuality. *Prima facie* this appears to be no small feat since the content or object of an individual's faith/absolute concern makes that individual the particular individual one is. Absolute faith must be capable of grasping a person without destroying her individuality by allowing the preliminary concerns to surface as relevant to the individual life of that person without permitting them to rival the ultimate concern.

The foregoing elucidates how faith can be true objectively, i.e. come into contact with that which truly heals, but faith can also be true subjectively. One could also have an idolatrous or destructive faith that is nevertheless *truly or genuinely expressed* through their ultimate concern, the fact that one is truly or genuinely concerned. "From the subjective side one must say that faith is true if it adequately expresses an ultimate concern. From the objective side one must say that faith is true if its content is the really ultimate" (*Dynamics*, 96).

B. *Idolatry*

Idolatry, unfaith, disbelief or the demonic as the opposite of absolute faith should already be readily intelligible; however, it is useful to reaffirm that

¹⁷ The attack by and concomitant "possession" of a person by such preliminary concerns is what Tillich calls the demonic.

although it is a faith that has not found the true answer it is still a faith that is truly in search of the answer. It still questions and doubts. Genuine faith, like the demonic, is also something that seizes an individual from without, though this should not be read in a way that implies coercion, such that the individual is no longer free and responsible. Genuine faith is rather a givenness or bestowal, an act of grace rather than seizure and possession. Neither idolatrous nor genuine faith is posited by the self as the arbitrary creator of values; meaning always comes, as it were, from the outside. If an idolatrous faith does set in, then autonomy is lost in the name of heteronomy (which, Tillich argues, is the precise opposite of what happens in theonomy), in the name of the idolatrous content of the faith. This loss of autonomy is not a loss in the sense of determinism but is akin to a psychological pathology. Although Tillich bifurcates faith into genuine and demonic, one should not feel that it is so black and white that it cannot be had in degrees. Neither genuine nor demonic faith is explicable in an intellectual manner. Faith is not an intellectual assent to propositions with a low degree of probability. This is an epistemological distortion of faith. Rather, faith is about the courage to accept one's life or to reject it; it is existentiell and an existential. As Ogden says, "Unfaith, like faith...is not a matter of self-conscious disbelief, but is a more or less conscious misunderstanding of one's own existence as a person...Unfaith is not the absence of faith, but the presence of faith in a deficient or distorted mode" (*Reality*, 23). The formulation of one's faith into doctrines and the intellectual assent to those doctrines is not the distinguishing mark of faith, but that is something derivative from faith as the more primordial phenomenon. The formulation of doctrine is an intellectualistic distortion of faith. Faith – the concrete religious life – is not a rationalization.

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The human person can ask questions, including the question of God, because, as the being who is simultaneously estranged and at home, she *is* the very question itself. Her faithful question concerns the meaning of being or the Holy as such. To be a person is to have faith, but with faith there is doubt. To be a person is to be a question and to be perpetually in question. Every person is constituted by faith, the phenomenon exposing existence as a lived question.

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EGZYSTENCJA JAKO PYTANIE WIARY:
TILLICHA EGZYSTENCJALNA REORIENTACJA ARGUMENTÓW
NA ISTNIENIE BOGA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł prezentuje podejście Paula Tillicha do kwestii wiary w Boga. Nie jest to ujęcie apologetyczne, ale takie, które sytuuje ją na poziomie egzystencji każdej istoty ludzkiej. Autor dowodzi, iż pojęcie wiary, Boga, pytania i troski tworzą wspólny horyzont rozumienia osoby ludzkiej. Człowiek jest istotą stawiającą pytania, włączając w to pytanie o Boga i świętość. Jego istotą jest wierzyć, ale wiarą popadającą ciągle w niepewność, ale także zaufanie, powierzenie się Tajemnicy. Każda osoba jest ukonstytuowana przez wiarę, fenomen odsłaniający egzystencję, jako przeżywającą pytanie. Artykuł przekonująco dowodzi, iż wspomniane wymiary dotyczą ostatecznych i nieredukowalnych aspektów ludzkiej istoty.

Słowa kluczowe: Tillich; egzystencja; osoba; wiara; Bóg.