

The philosophy of religion of Paul Tillich and its relevance to Unification Thought's Theory of the Original Image

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Abstract

Unification Thought's Theory of the Original Image and Paul Tillich's philosophy of religion are compared in terms of their common challenge: creating a meaningful link between religious insight and philosophical analysis. Arguments for the existence of God are considered inadequate by both systems. In the case of Tillich, such an argumentation is rejected because thought and being are seen to be in an irreducible paradoxical tension. God is the Unconditioned that cannot be grasped by thought. Unification Thought similarly rejects any form of panlogism, but sees God as possessing an internal dynamic between subject and object that allows him to relate to existing beings. Like the Original Being, each individual is created as a harmonized being of emotion, will and intellect. Therefore, our life experiences should all occur through the smooth cooperation of these three elements. In our apprehension of the divine, these three factors should come to be naturally integrated if they are to produce conclusive evidence.

Introduction

In spite of the many independent insights offered in each chapter of *Unification Thought*, the theory as a whole stands or falls with the first chapter, or Theory of the Original Image. Obviously, all subsequent references to God, the Original Being, are without merit or meaning if the initial statements about that Being are found to be inadequate. Thus, even though it is very tempting to leave the initial theoretical considerations about God aside and discuss a variety of issues, from education to family ethics and environmental studies, in which Unification Thought has much to offer, it is not possible to do so with an entirely clear conscience when one knows that the very ground of these considerations is still in question.

Examining the foundations of Unification Thought in juxtaposition with the thought of Paul Tillich makes particular sense because, among the great theologians of the 20th century, Tillich was without a doubt the one whose orientation was most philosophical. Thus, there is a genuine family resemblance between his approach and that of Unification Thought. At the same time, Tillich remains a mainstream Christian theologian, and not an outsider of mere

curiosity interest. The purpose here is not to establish a comparison nor is it to use one thought to give credibility to the other. It is to bring forward more clearly the nature of the common challenges faced, one thought serving in a sense as a mirror to the other. Since both thought systems belong broadly to what has been called the philosophy of religion, it is not surprising that there is a convergence.

Challenges of the Theory of the Original Image

As many have observed, one serious hindrance to a philosophical evaluation of Unification Thought in general and the Theory of the Original Image in particular is the fact that God's existence is explicitly "postulated" at the beginning, with no effort being made to introduce anything resembling the traditional proofs of God's existence. Everything that is said in the following chapters thus has a ring of *as if*, pending confirmation of the initial postulate. This impression is most certainly not the intention of the author: the reality of God is postulated – it is assumed to be true, to be factual. And reading the Unification Thought text is expected to confirm that initial postulate, as explicitly indicated at the beginning of the chapter on ontology.¹

A presentation of the classic arguments for the existence of God is not even attempted. Instead, Sang Hun Lee introduces his own method, which he calls *hypothetical*, but he only does so in a separate minor publication, not in the main body of Unification Thought.²

While I am aware that some of my colleagues feel otherwise, I believe that it was a wise decision to eliminate any argumentation for the existence of God from the main Unification Thought texts. The entire discussion of the evidence for the existence of God remains by its very nature tentative and can only play a supporting role.

The second question raised by Unification Thought's treatment of the discussion of the Original Being is content-related: God's nature and his attributes are described authoritatively in surprisingly great detail. Furthermore, the priority is given to elements that are not part of the usual attributes in Christianity and theism in general. On the very first page of *New Essentials*,³ one can read of traditional attributes like "omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, supreme good[ness], supreme beauty, supreme truth, righteousness, love, creativity, and

¹ UTI, *New Essentials of Unification Thought. Head-Wing Thought*. Tokyo, 2005, p. 103.

² Only found in unpublished form. Dr. Lee makes a good case for the universality of the dual characteristic in the world (though his evidence remains open to inevitable challenges), but he does not make the step towards showing how this proves a common origin of the characteristics in an Original Being. He merely announces that it would be possible to present that evidence.

³ *New Essentials*, p. 1.

so on ...” that they are affirmed by Unification Thought as “belonging to the Divine Character of God” but that “a more important aspect of the attributes of God... is the Divine Image.” And even in the section on the Divine Character, one has to read these traditional attributes into the sub-sections on Heart, Logos, and Creativity, i.e., they are not dealt with explicitly for the most part.

The first issue mainly represents a problem in the confrontation with philosophy. The second, with theology. But the very fact of approaching the theme of God philosophically has been challenged from both the philosophical side and the theological side.

A. The question of the validity of the philosophy of religion

1. The Unification Thought approach

Unification Thought is unique in many ways, and like many landmarks in the history of human thought it at first doesn't seem to fit the trends of the times. To what extent it itself is a landmark and to what extent it does meet the needs of the times in a deeper sense is a question that everyone will have to answer for themselves. But there are some aspects it has in common with any project in the general realm of the philosophy of religion. Tillich's thought, which has been chosen here as a reference, is no exception, as we will see.

As a religious philosophy, Unification Thought brings together two key spheres of humankind's inner world – religion and philosophy. At the same time, it also highlights the difficulty of their relationship.

The challenge from the religious side

In one of his early writings, Paul Tillich wrote that, “in religion, philosophy encounters something that resists becoming an object of philosophy.”⁴ And: “Protest against objectification is the pulse beat of religion.”⁵ For many religious people, one cannot philosophize about religion without killing what makes it real. The core of religion is something that directly touches the soul. It is a matter of our personal response. Discussing religion is turning it into an idea, a theory, and that is not what it essentially is. Unification Thought's exposition of the Original Image's structure in particular is often perceived to be disturbingly dry

⁴ Paul Tillich, “Religionsphilosophie,” in: Lehrbuch der Philosophie. Hrsg. M. Dessoir, II, 1925, 765-835. English: Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* New York: Harper & Row, 1969, p. 27.

⁵ Paul Tillich, „Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie“, in: Kant-Studien, 27, 1922, 446-469. English: Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* New York: Harper & Row, 1969, p. p. 146.

and at the same time puzzling by its precision in detail – keeping in mind that this is all about an invisible entity.

The challenge from philosophy

On the other hand, the largely non-religious approach of contemporary philosophy tends to ignore religion and often refuses to consider religious language as meaningful. From most philosophical perspectives, obviously, Unification Thought makes many unwarranted claims. Unification Thought's epistemology follows its ontology (including the Theory of the Original Nature), rather than the reverse, which would be expected according to the modern philosophical method. This has prompted one observer to comment that Unification Thought's epistemology "collapses into its ontology"⁶ – in short, that its epistemology bases its claims on the unsubstantiated claims of its ontology, resulting in circular reasoning. At the same time, Unification Thought's claims are extremely ambitious, in rather stark contrast to the spirit of our times.

Standing at the crossroads between religious faith and philosophy's rational mode of inquiry, Unification Thought thus finds itself challenged in its legitimacy from both sides.

2. Paul Tillich: On the Boundary

Tillich received his doctorate in philosophy but worked as a Lutheran pastor before starting his academic career (he served as a chaplain during World War I). His life has always straddled the dividing line between religion and philosophy. In his autobiography, *On the Boundary*, he has indicated that he saw a meaning in that position and was comfortable with it, because it allowed him to touch the core of things and at the same time to express them in understandable form, as far as possible. "If a reunion of theology and philosophy is ever to be possible it will be achieved only in a synthesis that does justice to this experience of the abyss in our lives [revealed by World War I]. My philosophy of religion has attempted to meet this need. It consciously remains on the boundary between theology and philosophy, taking care not to lose the one in the other. It attempts to express the experience of abyss in philosophical concepts..."⁷

However, he too has been criticized from both sides. Referring to Tillich's early code name for God, the "Unconditioned" (*das Unbedingte*), Karl Barth spoke of a

⁶ Nona R. Bolin, "Ontology, Origin and Epistemology," paper presented at the 19th International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, Seoul, Korea, August 19-26, 1992.

⁷ Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966 [German Original: *Auf der Grenze*, 1936], p. 52.

“frozen monstrosity,”⁸ while contemporary philosophers at Marburg, where Tillich also taught, felt that his religious views were somewhat outdated and lacked credibility on an intellectual level. Thus, Kee Chong Ryu,⁹ notes that Tillich’s view of God has been criticized by both traditionalist Christians and positivist philosophers, the former insisting that Tillich’s God had little to do with the God of the Bible and the latter arguing that his thought was a new form of metaphysical speculation.

Tillich himself may have some responsibility for this double rejection: he is not always consistent or even careful in expressing his thought and, as a born preacher, he tends to make provocative statements that can also be quite obscure – such as his contention that God “does not exist.” But fundamentally, the difficulty he faced is that of philosophy of religion itself. It is that of a mediator and translator.

B. Tillich’s philosophy of religion

1. *Basic orientation*

In the early 1920s, Tillich was one of those who enthusiastically welcomed Karl Barth’s new emphasis on the absoluteness of God and his refusal of the liberal theology of his time, with its tendency to be submissive to the demands of culture. At the same time, Tillich early on made it clear that he could not accept Barth’s so-called dialectical theology without restrictions. His objection was that Barth was, precisely, not dialectical on a key point: his “no” to human nature and culture was a total “no.” It was not counterbalanced by a necessary “yes.” In a short piece written in 1926,¹⁰ Tillich remarks: “It is not acceptable to understand the notion of [divine] creation in a purely negative way. Things cannot deny their origin to such an extent that they longer have anything to do with it. ... Autonomy need not be pure *hubris*; it can also be the recognition of and obedience to the divine-natural laws that carry being.” Culture, he wrote, is immediately important for faith.

Thus, Tillich’s position is encapsulated in the paradoxical statement that, even though the Unconditioned transcends every type of finite form, it can only be

⁸ James Luther Adams, introduction to Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* (New York: Harper & Row), 1969, p. 15.

⁹ Kee Chong Ryu, *Nāgārjuna’s Emptiness and Paul Tillich’s God: A Comparative Study for the Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism*. Ph.D. Thesis, Drew University 1984. Published as : *Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. God and emptiness as Interpreted by Paul Tillich and Nagarjuna* (Seoul, Korea: Kyung Suh Won Inc.), 1985.

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, “Karl Barth (1926).” In: *Begegnungen. Paul Tillich über sich selbst und andere*. Gesammelte Werke, Band XII. Evangelisches Verlagswerk Stuttgart, 1971, pp. 187-193. My translation.

expressed through finite forms, i.e., through cultural and intellectual content, though this content will have to be broken and taken up differently again and again. Just as it is impossible to deny the priority of Being, it is impossible to deny its proper place to thinking. The philosophy of religion is thus an impossible undertaking – that of grasping the infinite – but it is an inevitable, necessary one. In the words of Keiji Nishitani, “[A religion’s philosophy] is to religion what water is to fish; an essential condition for life. Water is neither the life of the fish as such nor its body, and yet it is essentially linked to both of them. A change of worldview or ontology is a matter no less fatal to a religion than a change from salt water to fresh is to a fish.”¹¹

2. The critical-intuitive method

Tillich’s philosophy of religion is interesting in that it represents an attempt to make definite statements about God while entirely bypassing the need for the proofs of God or arguments for his existence. As we will see, this comes at a price that Unification Thought would not be willing to pay, so to speak, but it does introduce a very interesting perspective. In his early writings (1920-1923), Tillich has elaborated what he called the *critical-intuitive method* (*kritisch-intuitive Methode*), a name which he subsequently changed to *metalogical method*. In his later work of the American period, which was dominated by the more existentialist and theological approach of his correlative method, neither name is remembered. But, as Tillich often emphasized himself, his basic approach has never changed, even though his emphasis may have varied and his scope widened (and perhaps occasionally narrowed).

Tillich’s rather bold approach is to state that religious consciousness is fundamental to human consciousness itself, which means that there is no human consciousness that is not religious. This obviously comes together with a new definition of what “religious” means. For Tillich, it is the mind’s inevitable orientation towards the *Unconditioned*, a term inherited from Kant and beyond. Even the atheist’s insistence that there “absolutely” is no God testifies to this orientation towards the absolute or unconditioned, and so does the materialist atomist’s statement that the atom is the “ultimate” building block of the universe. Thus, for Tillich, the Unconditioned and the ultimate concern that leads us to it stand for either God or whatever takes his place in people’s minds.

The first component of his method, the critical element, Tillich borrowed from Kant. In his 1920 lecture series on the philosophy of religion, Tillich mixes his thematic approach with a sweeping historical overview. In substance, once humankind has gone beyond an (unspecified) period of immediate religiosity,

¹¹ Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1982, p. 77.

reflection sets in permanently. His lectures start with some impressive observations on the way the religious mind in its original immediacy rejects anything that will challenge that very immediacy, i.e., otherness in one of two forms: another religion, or cultural realms other than religion. Both have become a permanent fixture after the Protestant Reformation. With the advent of reflection comes the temptation to isolate intellectually the ultimate essence, or source, of religion and existence itself. These are the great metaphysical systems from Descartes to Leibniz. This, according to Tillich, proves to be a dead-end street. “The question of the truth of religion is identical with the question of its validity. The question of its truth cannot be decided through an analysis of the metaphysical correctness of the content of religious representations, such as a transcendent or immanent God. Such proofs will always be illusory.”¹² Thus, for Tillich, discussing God as an object among others, even the highest one, is fundamentally improper. In that sense, Tillich anticipated Heidegger’s own challenge to what he called onto-theology.¹³

With his critical philosophy, Kant put an end to this hopeless undertaking and brought us back to the real starting point of knowledge: the human consciousness. And, for Kant, the Unconditioned is the necessary horizon of every finite thought process. “For that which of necessity impels us to transcend the limits of experience and of all phenomena is the unconditioned, which reason absolutely requires in things as they are in themselves, in order to complete the series of conditions.”¹⁴ In other words, for Kant, there needs to be a thing-in-itself behind and beyond every phenomenal thing, otherwise there would be infinite regress in the series of causation, something our mind cannot possibly accept. This comes very close to an acceptance of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. Nevertheless, for Kant it is nothing but an assumption our mind must make, not something it can theoretically grasp (he makes his point clear in his well-known antinomies). Thus, for Kant, the thing-in-itself towards which our reason necessarily points without ever reaching it is a *limiting concept* (*Grenzbegriff*), i.e., a concept that is entirely empty, except for saying that “there must be something out there.”

Tillich criticizes this recourse to the thing-in-itself, saying that through this subterfuge Kant reintroduces an objectifying view of God. The thing-in-itself may not be a possible object of theoretical knowledge for Kant, but it is an object

¹² Paul Tillich, *Berliner Vorlesungen I (1919-1920)*. Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände zu den gesammelten Werken von Paul Tillich. Band XII (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2000), p. 346. My translation.

¹³ Tillich himself has often acknowledged Heidegger’s influence on his thought. In this case, however, Tillich’s position was already clear in 1919, while Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* was only published in 1927. It is then that Tillich became aware of Heidegger’s philosophy.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [Bxx].

nevertheless.¹⁵ In Tillich's eyes, we have here a leftover of dogmatism. And just like the old metaphysical systems sought to prove the reality of a transcendent ultimate Being by using rational arguments, Kant sought to "prove" the necessary existence of God, the ultimate thing-in-itself, by applying his moral proof – a step that, of course, Tillich rejects. Later, in his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich would remark that thus trying to deduce the necessity of a supreme being "is as impossible logically as it is impossible existentially to derive courage from anxiety."¹⁶

For Tillich, there needs to be a second moment in the approach of ultimate reality, and that is the intuitive component. Here again, he offers an overview of those, in the history of western thought, who have represented a second current besides that of rationalism. That current has often been repressed or ignored, but it has nevertheless remained very powerful in a less visible way and is represented by thinkers like Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Husserl with his phenomenological method. Tillich also refers to mystics, notably Jakob Böhme and Meister Eckhart, and philosophers of religion, in particular Jakob-Friedrich Fries and Rudolf Otto.

3. God beyond subject and object

For Tillich, therefore, there is a fundamental paradox rooted in the very nature of things, and it is related to our apprehension of the Unconditioned. The following sentences, found in a 1922 article where Tillich clarifies his own position after discovering that of Karl Barth, vividly express the essence of his vision. "The fact that it [the Unconditioned] becomes an object is indeed the primal paradox, since by its nature the Unconditioned stands beyond the antithesis of subject and object. Thus, every statement about the Unconditioned is necessarily in the form of a paradox [that is] not resolvable. It poses a problem that calls for intuition (*Schauen*)."¹⁷ And a little further: "The Unconditioned stands beyond both subject and object."¹⁸

The understanding that the Unconditioned, or God,¹⁹ is beyond the distinction between subject and object is introduced in the context of Tillich's understanding

¹⁵ Nishitani comes to an amazingly similar conclusion: "Kant looks on things from the very outset as *objects*; or, to put it the other way around, his standpoint is that of *representation*. In this theoretical philosophy, an objective, representational point of view is presupposed as a constant base. The problem of the thing-in-itself developed, in fact, from the presupposition of such a base." *Ibid.* p. 133.

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 208.

¹⁷ Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie, in: *Kant-Studien*, 27, 1922, 446-469. English: Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* New York: Harper & Row, 1969, pp. 122-123.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125-126.

¹⁹ Since the present paper examines Tillich's thought and Unification Thought sometimes in the same sentence, I have abandoned the idea of systematically using the appropriate terminology to

of the Unconditioned as the absolute, that which is not conditioned by anything. In a subject-object relationship, the subject depends on the object and vice versa. As discrete entities, both are naturally conditioned and finite, thus they cannot reside within the infinite and unconditioned pure being. One is reminded of Parmenides' being which cannot include movement, because movement would imply non-being (hence, for Parmenides, movement must be illusion).²⁰

Thus, for Tillich, Being, which is the nature of the Unconditioned, faces us like an impenetrable wall. It can be perceived through intuition – be it the mystical approach or the phenomenological one – but it forever defies reason. In his 1920 lectures, Tillich stunningly visualizes this process in what he himself calls a platonic myth.²¹ To illustrate the age-old philosophical question, “why is there something, rather than nothing?” he describes the reaction of thought when faced with the unmovable reality of a stone. Though the stone may have a rational structure corresponding to that of thinking, its presence itself is entirely alien to thought. The stone is there and won't move. And yet, in a certain way, thought discovers that it can negate the stone – it can reduce the stone to a mere nexus of categories and representations: the stone exists only in my mind! However, says Tillich, this is a pyrrhic victory. Thought comes to feel a longing for the reality of the stone. Without it, thought loses its foundation and falls into the abyss. Thus, to the thinking mind, the brutal reality of being (the stone) is both terrifying (thought cannot control it) and the strangely appealing object of longing. Expressed in more philosophical terms, we have here Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.²²

4. *The [non-]existence of God*

Significantly, and in consistence with the above, for Tillich, God “does not exist.” This famous statement has occasionally caused him to be called an atheist.²³ If that position is adopted, the question of the proofs does not even arise. It is also quite logical, then, that Tillich rejects the traditional arguments for God's existence, not so much because they are each lacking in some particular way, but because they seek to prove the existence of a Being that does not exist. Of course, for Tillich, God is nevertheless real, but if that reality cannot be subsumed under “existence,” it has to be approached differently. In substance, Tillich's point is

refer to the divine being, God, because that would simply be impossible. Ultimate Being is thus used interchangeably with the Unconditioned or the Original Being when the identity of that Being is beyond question.

²⁰ One could say that Tillich' understanding of the world of existence and its relationship to Being is Heraclitean, while his understanding of the Supreme Being itself is Parmenidean – which at once shows his predicament.

²¹ Paul Tillich, *Berliner Vorlesungen*, p. 400.

²² Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1958.

²³ For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Robert R. N. Ross, *The Non-Existence of God. Linguistic Paradox in Tillich's Thought* (New York & Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press), 1978.

that it is wrong to speak about God in the way we speak about things. It is that habit, he insisted, that represents true atheism, because it makes God into what God is not. Tillich joins Thomas Aquinas in accepting the terminology of *pure being* that is beyond essence and existence to describe God.

Tillich also likes to refer to God as the “ground of being,” an approximate translation of the German *Urgrund* found in Jakob Böhme and Schelling. *Urgrund* is more precisely translated as “original ground” – that which is beyond any other, finite ground, that which is on an entirely different plane and not an ordinary cause.²⁴ This comes very close to Unification Thought’s notion of Original Being. And *Urgrund* is also related to *Abgrund*, the Abyss Tillich also refers to constantly.

Finally, for Tillich, the unconditioned pure being that is the object of our ultimate concern and the abyss that is facing us, is also equated with the *infinite*. As he explains in his *Systematic Theology*, the infinite is never given as an object. “Infinity is a demand, not a thing.”²⁵

We now see that Tillich’s philosophy of religion makes a number of claims that can be quite enlightening in the present context. Embedded in them, however, are some very problematic notions as well.²⁶ The non-existence of God and the statement that God is beyond subject and object deserve closer observation in light of Unification Thought. I will begin with God’s non-existence.

C. Difference

Unification Thought in fact does make a clear distinction between God as the “Original Being” and “human beings and other creations” as “*existing* beings” or “*resultant* beings.”²⁷ The implicit conclusion here is that God, indeed, is not an existing being. It would certainly be wrong to read an existentialist intent into the term “existing beings,” but the difference between existence in the ordinary sense and the reality of the Original Being is nevertheless clearly made. God is thus on an entirely different plane from all individual existing entities, as the Theory of the Original Image makes abundantly clear. Still, the difference to Tillich is immediately evident: Unification Thought discusses the Original Being as an epistemological object that can be described in great detail.

²⁴ It should be noted that, in his first *Critique*, Kant has already been struggling with the differentiation between ground and cause.

²⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 190.

²⁶ One of them, which is related to the notion of existence, is the belief that existence itself is somehow connected to the problem of evil. The coming into existence as discrete entities is brought into correlation with the notion of the Fall – a view that can already be found in the later Schelling and that Unification Thought rejects.

²⁷ *Essentials*, p. 1.

Towards the end of the Theory of the Original Image, there is a section entitled “Unity in the Structure of the Original Image.”

The realm of the Original Image transcends time and space. Hence the notion of structure, when applied to it, can only be expressed by using time and space as an analogy, and it can be summarized by the expression of unity. Since there is no space in this realm, there is no position either, and notions such as before and after, right and left, up and down, inside and outside, wide and narrow, or far and near do not exist; neither do such things as a triangle, a rectangle, or a square. It is a realm where the infinitely large and the infinitely small coincide, and where the entirety of space comes together in one point. At the same time, it is a realm where up and down, before and after, right and left, and inside and outside extend without limits.

Similarly, the realm of the Original Image is without time. Thus by analogy, to use the language of time, past, present and future, are united in the one moment of the “now.” There is eternity in an instant and the two notions are intimately linked. They are actually identical. This means that the world of the Original Image is one of pure permanence in a state of oneness (that of the united *sungsang* and *hyungsang*, and *yang* and *yin*). The pure permanence of that state is the notion of time in the realm of the Original Image. In summary, the realm of the Original Image is a “pure united body.” In other words, all phenomena of the universe, including time and space, originate in that one united point. The four-position foundation and origin – division – union action unfold into time and space starting from this one point.²⁸

This passage is both strangely similar to Tillich’s description and yet decidedly different. “Beyond subject and object” is somewhat ambiguous, as is feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther’s similar claim that “God(ess) must be seen as beyond maleness and femaleness.”²⁹ Beyond can be understood to mean “in a realm where subject and object don’t exist and mean nothing” or “in a realm that transcends and precedes their existence as discrete entities.”

Unification Thought sees the notion that absoluteness implies the absence of movement, hence the absence of life, as a tragic misconception due to ignorance about spiritual reality. In the physical world, movement leads to irreversible change in time and space, hence it can be seen as involving non-being as well as being. In the Original Being, subject and object (*sungsang* and *hyungsang*, *yang* and *yin*) exist not as separate entities, but as attributes present simultaneously

²⁸ Research Institute for the Integration of World Thought, *An Introduction to the Thought of Sun Myung Moon. Unification Thought and V.O.C. Theory*. New York: HAS-UWC, 2003, p. 41. See also *Essentials*, pp. 90-91, where “pure permanence” is translated as “pure continuance.”

²⁹ Rosemary Radford Reuther, “The feminine nature of God,” in: *Concilium*, 143 (1981).

in the “here and now.” Also, Unification Thought sees Heart, the irrepressible impulse to create joy through love, as the core of the Original Being, God. That very impulse, love, implies the movement from one pole to another, and for it to appear in the world it must be anchored in the Original Being. Thus, the Original Being becomes the paragon of all created beings – not the wholly other in the sense of not possessing the very qualities of existing entities derived from it.

In Unification Thought, “beyond subject and object” is not to be understood as excluding the features of subject and object from the Original Being. Actually, the whole first chapter of Unification Thought is a description of the fundamental subject-object relationships within the Original Being! What the passage cited here makes clear is that the spatio-temporal nature of the description is analogical. The Original Being is a pure united entity. Subject and object in God are not two different entities, but characteristics that unfold visibly in the world of existence. Within the Original Being, they can be said to express direction and priority.

The entire understanding of attributes existing in a relationship of give-and-take within the oneness of an absolute Original Being needs further investigation. It requires spiritual intuition as well as intellectual understanding. In Unification Thought, it is further understood to be reflected in the spiritual world, where time and space exist but are not subjected to the rigid limitations of the physical world.

At this point, it is already possible to apply the above consideration to the discussion of Tillich’s philosophy of religion.

C. Deconstructing the notion of paradox

It is now possible to “deconstruct” Tillich’s notion of paradox. For Tillich, as we have seen, the ontological paradox cannot be brought to a simple resolution as in the case of the logical paradox or the paradox consisting of a provocative verbal formulation. The ontological paradox reveals an inner contradiction in the very relationship we have to the ground of being. To this, at least three comments can be made.

First, if the Ultimate Being is a stranger to subject-object relationships, it is logical that it would be impossible to establish a subject-relationship with it (or him/her) without running into a paradoxical situation. If, as Unification Thought sees it, the Ultimate Being is itself the harmonious oneness of subject-object relationships, the situation is entirely different. In particular, it becomes possible to conceive that the Ultimate Being can become the object of human perception or action naturally.

Second, if the Ultimate Being exists as the unity of subject and object elements interacting with each other through give-and-take action, it is indeed possible to say that he “exists.” Though he does so in a different way from separate entities, there is no contradiction in using the word “exist” as long as the unique nature of that existence is not forgotten.

Third, since the *sungsang-hyungsang* polarity within the Original Being involves the *noesis-noema* type polarity of intellectual function and categories of thought (ideas, notions, mathematical formulas), as well as emotional content, the Original Being is seen as fully rational as well as fully emotional, with no paradoxical relationship between the two.

Nevertheless:

In spite of this, the notion of paradox as it appears in Tillich’s philosophy of religion and elsewhere is obviously far from being without merit.

First, placing the Ultimate Being in the position of object in the process of cognition can only be done while remembering the special nature of that object. While there is no fundamental paradox (contradiction), the infinite and intangible Original Being cannot be cognized like just any entity. The frustration of a paradoxical situation inevitably appears once the human intellect tries to grasp God and fit him into its understanding. Rev. Moon has repeatedly emphasized that it is not possible to fully understand God rationally, but only through the intuition of Heart.³⁰ It should also be added that, strictly speaking, nothing, not even the minutest finite entities, can be fully grasped by the intellect. The color red cannot be understood, merely intuited and described analogically. On this point, Tillich was perfectly right. And the objectification of even finite beings, if it implies the disregard for that being’s own subjective nature, is always wrong (consider for instance placing someone in the position of sex object). Again, Tillich was right.

Second, if Unification Thought itself makes the difference between the Original *Being* and “*existing* beings,” it is not without reason. In the Unification Thought view, the Original Being, while being perfect and self-sufficient, absolutely needs an object partner in order to create joy. The joy produced by a loving relationship is the only thing that eludes even the Original Being as long as it remains alone. This is a complex topic of its own. What is relevant here is that God’s existence through human beings whom he created takes on a fuller meaning than his

³⁰ On this, see also: Andrew Wilson, “Knowledge of God? A Critique and Proposal for Epistemology in Unification Thought,” in: *Journal of Unification Studies*, vol. IV, 2001-2002, pp. 33-41.

being apart from them. In that particular sense, existence can be seen as more, not less than being.

Third, while it is true that the Original Being is a “mathematical,” hence rational God, it is also true that in the existing world his actions often appear paradoxical. On this point, Unification Thought would insist that the paradox, perceived so vividly by Tillich can be fully resolved through the wisdom that comes from an understanding of the laws of creation as they apply to restoration – again, a different topic altogether.

The notion of paradox as an internal contradiction within the nature of things is alien to Unification Thought, as is the use of the term antithesis. Tillich’s use of the dialectic is not only to be traced back to Hegel and Marx, but even more perhaps to Tillich’s Lutheran background, i.e., to Paul via Luther, and the paradox is that between God’s judgment and his acceptance. This paradox, Unification Thought believes, can be solved through an understanding of God’s Heart relating to the Human Fall, but it is not really the issue here. It simply shows that Tillich’s approach is not primarily a theoretical one, but one painfully grounded in life experiences.

Tillich’s additional contributions

What is being religious?

Tillich’s innovative definition of what constitutes the religious mind – the orientation towards the Unconditioned – and his contention that this orientation is constitutive of the unity of our consciousness is very significant from the perspective of Unification Thought. It implies that the orientation towards God is inborn in human beings, that it comes prior to any other element, and that it cannot be destroyed, even by what Christianity calls sin. It also implies that religiousness is not fundamentally linked to the notion of church and religion as it is usually understood.

For Unification Thought, religion in the sense of the religious life required by the major world religions is a temporary phenomenon due to the Human Fall. However, the religious dimension in the sense intended by Paul Tillich is to be a permanent core element of human life. It is the relationship that links us to the Original Being and underlies all other relationships and dimensions, including the most secular and apparently insignificant ones.

If there is a difference in the two approaches, it is the way in which this relationship is understood (which has just been discussed in the section on paradox). There is also the fact that the religious orientation as understood by Tillich seems to allow for anti-religious types of absolute concern (Marxism,

Nazism) to stand on the same level as genuinely religious ones. However, Tillich himself addresses that question in his further elaboration. Whether his conclusions are appropriate or not is beyond the point being made here.

From the position of Unification Thought, it is certainly also Tillich's merit to have rejected the position of supernaturalism, traditional (and Neo-Orthodox) Christianity's solution to the paradox in the relationship between finite and sinful humans and God. Tillich saw in it a refusal to address the legitimate questions associated with our human condition.

The dialogue with the world's religions

It is appropriate in this particular venue to briefly introduce one further aspect of Tillich's thought in his later period: the dialogue with non-Christian religions, notably with Buddhism and particularly with the Japanese Zen form of Buddhism.

While Tillich, to my knowledge, totally ignores the traditional yin-yang dimension that Unification Thought has incorporated into its vision, his understanding of the Unconditioned has, from the very beginning, come very close to the notion of Nothingness or Emptiness, through his reference to the *via negativa* of Christian mystical theology.

In his later years, Tillich has extensively discussed similarities and differences with representatives of the Japanese Zen tradition during his visits to Japan and in meetings in the United States. In particular, we have the transcripts of three meetings with Hisamatsu Shin'ichi that took place at Harvard in 1957.³¹ The dialogue is unfortunately most revealing by the fact that the two scholars, Tillich in particular, seem to lack the necessary flexibility to be able to penetrate into the mental world of the other. Tillich has obvious difficulties with the paradoxical statements of the Zen master, such as references to the form of the formless self, and the absence of objective reality, as he sees it, in that thought (this should perhaps be reformulated). In any case, there is a slightly ironical paradox in the very nature of their encounter. Beyond these limitations, however, Tillich's outlook has the potential for bringing together western theism and Buddhist thought in ways other Christian theologians could not. Indirectly, it can thus also contribute to a new look at non-theistic traditions from the Far East from the perspective of Unification Thought.

³¹ Paul Tillich, "Dialogues, East and West. Conversations between Dr. Paul Tillich and Dr. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi." In: *The Encounter of Religions and Quasi-Religions* (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press), 1990. See also: Paul Tillich, "A Christian-Buddhist Conversation," in: *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. Bampton Lecture, Columbia University, 1961 (New York: Columbia University Press), 1963, pp. 53-75.

D. Conclusion: a return to the issue of God's existence

Tillich and others

We can now return to the question of the arguments for the existence of God, arguments that Tillich rejected in their classical form. Of course, Tillich himself did not deny that there was possible evidence, but his approach was different, as can be seen from the following statement:

“Every cognitive assumption (hypothesis) must be tested. The safest test is a repeatable experiment. ... [But] verification can occur within the life-process itself. Verification of this type (experiential in contradistinction to experimental) has the advantage that it need not halt and disrupt the totality of a life-process in order to distil calculable elements out of it (which experimental verification must do). The verifying experiences of a nonexperimental character are truer to life, though less exact and definite.”³²

Edward Cell, who calls Tillich a leading proponent of a wider sense of cognition, comments that “it is easy to see that experiential tests are not only ‘less definite,’ but very indefinite – a fact that, to many seems to make the cognitive value of statements so tested very doubtful.”³³ However, what the experiential dimension lacks in definiteness (especially on an intersubjective level), it gains in immediacy.

In a completely different context, classic Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming highlights the relationship between not only cognition and experience, but cognition and ethics: “Like many Chinese, Wang emphasized the need to cultivate certain affective states and saw these as playing a critical *cognitive role* in moral understanding.” And: “Wang and his disciples see a true *religious faith* in the power of the innate moral mind; they regard it as a faculty, akin to seeing or hearing, that allows them to realize what is right in each and every situation they encounter.”³⁴

Kant's follower Fries and, more recently, Alvin Plantinga and others have argued that the human mind has in some way an innate capacity to know God that is equal, even more basic and immediate, than rational cognition. Neither should the traditional proofs for God's existence be entirely disregarded. In recent years, they have in fact been rejuvenated in many ways. The cosmological argument and the teleological argument have benefited from modern science,

³² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 102.

³³ Edward Cell, *Language, Existence, and God*. Nashville – New York: Abingdon Press, 1971, p. 22.

³⁴ Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-Evaluation*. The Rockwell Lecture Series, Vol. 3. New York: Peter Lang, 1993, pp. 77 and 79-80.

with the Big Bang and the Anthropic Principle. Recent refinements of the latter have, for instance, led the well-known negative atheist Antony Flew to change to a deistic position.³⁵ And, as noted by R. N. Ross,³⁶ Tillich's position comes very close to a form of the ontological argument (in spite of Tillich's own persistent denials), since the Unconditioned is presented as the inevitable horizon of our mind.

Unification Thought

Unification Thought would essentially agree with all the above. Ninian Smart perhaps comes closest to the Unification Thought position when he says that the chief use of the doctrinal or philosophical dimension is "to present an intellectual vision. Its being intellectual will not diminish its existential impact: indeed, hopefully the opposite is the case. For it is lack of plausibility that saps the sense of inspiration ..."³⁷ Logical arguments are more suggestive elements than absolute proofs, but they do represent a legitimate revelation of the divine.

Next, in my opinion, it would be extremely useful if the Unification Thought community were to produce a publication on the discussion about the Original Being as a companion to the existing Unification Thought textbooks. Such a publication would have greater freedom in exploring various avenues and analyzing them beyond the basic formulations that have their proper place in a primary document such as *Essentials*.

But, in principle at least, Unification Thought's basic position is simple. It directly relates to its unified view of reality. Like the Original Being, each individual is created as a harmonized being of emotion, will and intellect. Therefore, our life experiences should all occur through the smooth cooperation of these three elements. In our apprehension of the divine, these three factors should naturally be integrated to produce conclusive evidence. In Ninian Smart's terms, each should contribute its type of revelation to our heart and mind.

As noted at the beginning of *Essentials'* chapter on Ontology, the Theory of the Original Image is "a deductive theory based on the Divine Principle,³⁸ a systematic presentation of Rev. Moon's insight obtained through spiritual search and revelation. The answer to the question about the validity of the initial postulate of God's existence is then expected to come through empirical

³⁵ Flew defines negative atheism as a position that does not positively deny God, but simply considers that, for now at least, there is no conclusive evidence for his existence. For Flew's change of mind, refer to: <http://www.antonyflew.com/>

³⁶ Robert R. N. Ross, *The Non-Existence of God. Linguistic Paradox in Tillich's Thought* (New York & Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press), 1978, p. 70 ff.

³⁷ Ninian Smart & Steven Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1991, p. 104.

³⁸ *Essentials*, p. 103.

verification, where empirical means much more than it does in usual discourse: intuitive insights obtained through “meditative” reading of the document, rational insights gained from understanding the consistency of the vision that is presented and, last but not least, confirmation through application in one’s own lifestyle and transformation of one’s environment.