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Regarding Estrangement:
Perceiving the Infinite in Symbol and Fusing Horizons

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Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce the reader to Paul Tillich's notion of the "symbol," including "religious symbol," and Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons," including his notion of the "question" and "play" or "game." It introduces the pertinent aspects of Tillich's and Gadamer's literary writings as well as explains the motivation behind their respective works, namely, their different reactions to estrangement and alienation. During the explication of how Tillich's "symbol" and Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" redeem us, an examination of how each thinker works with issues of subjective and objective thinking, what it means for the question to be a priority and how these issues relate to our ontology, is made. This thesis culminates with an examination of the appropriateness and applicability of Tillich's and Gadamer's approaches to hermeneutical thinking.

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Thesis Introduction

This thesis joins on three primary issues concerning Paul Tillich's theological work on the religious symbol and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic as it relates specifically to "fusing horizons" and his notion of "play" or "game."

First, this thesis is an examination of the way in which the religious symbol and philosophical hermeneutics overcome estrangement and alienation.

It will be shown that Paul Tillich and Hans-Georg Gadamer recognize, with stunning lucidity, the need to make connections between several dimensions of experience, namely, those dimensions typically segmented between the natural sciences and human sciences, arts and sciences, religious *experience* and philosophical *thought*, et cetera. It will be argued that Tillich's religious symbol and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic are two distinctive hermeneutical approaches that are attempts to bridge artificial epistemological boundaries and existential estrangement. It will be shown that Tillich and Gadamer are reactionary and redemptive thinkers, particularly as their efforts are attempts to overcome estrangement and alienation created by and/or experienced by humanity.

Tillich desires to expound on his notion of the religious symbol as the mediating factor between the finite and infinite. His work concerning the symbol is an attempt to overcome the strict bifurcations of subject and object as well as to bridge the existential estrangement of our being from the "ground of being" that we can participate in, as an experience of the alien (the ultimate that cannot be spoken of literally) and the familiar (the finite we are familiar with).

Gadamer seeks out the universality of the hermeneutical problem which can emerge only when we are freed from the methodological assumptions that pervade our assumptions about

ourselves (our being, our experiences, our tradition, et cetera). Philosophical hermeneutics bridges the alienating gap of meaning experienced, for example, in a work of art or in considering historical actions. Gadamer's hermeneutic includes the alien that we strive to understand and the familiar world we already understand.

Second, this thesis is an examination of the way in which Tillich's and Gadamer's dialectical approaches maintain the priority of the question (including related elements, e.g., the need for openness) in response to their ontological understandings.

It will be shown that the hermeneutics of Tillich and Gadamer are attempts to replace the logic of propositions with the logic of dialectic (question and answer) that is continual in process, and that does not have a fixed resting point or end of dialogue but a perpetual participation in the dialectic of infinite possibilities (understanding that is not static but dynamic understanding that is experiential). It will be argued that their dialectical approaches are attempts to make the deepest thoughts and feelings accessible to understanding. For example, it will be shown that for Gadamer the aesthetic consciousness (e.g., in his notion of "play" or "game") must be given back the truth value it has lost, and that for Tillich the religious symbol must be revived (e.g., employed in discourse) as it participates in the transcendental to which it points.

It will be shown that both Tillich and Gadamer emphasize the ontological determination of experience (understanding determined by existence) in which an analysis of human experience is the basis for hermeneutical consciousness. For Tillich "being" is grounded upon the creative providence of "Being-Itself" from which we are, at least partially, estranged. For Gadamer "being" is grounded in language and tradition. Also, it will be shown that both Tillich and Gadamer emphasize language in which understanding is mediated. For Tillich that emphasis is

evident in the need for symbols. For Gadamer language is an inseparable part of our being.

Third, this thesis, as primarily an examination of the redemption of humanity from alienation and estrangement, will look closely at Tillich's and Gadamer's understandings, which are central to each hermeneutic, of the subjective and objective bifurcation. It will be argued that through Tillich's correlation of subjective and objective elements (inseparable) in the symbol and Gadamer's "play" and "fusion of horizons," in which understanding is not a reconstruction but a participation in a movement of history without autonomous parts (interpreter or text), that there is an overcoming of subject and object dichotomies for a "universal" hermeneutic of "experience" that must maintain the priority of the question and openness.

It will be shown that the subjective and objective tendencies that pervade our present culture are argued against in Gadamer's and Tillich's works. For example, it will be argued that in Tillich's thought the contrast between philosophical (e.g., secular) and theological (e.g., biblical) language is neither necessary nor possible. It will be shown that it is not possible to separate and contrast these two ways of speaking because all the symbols used in theological discourse aim toward the same goal as the philosophical, namely, the quest to overcome estrangement and come into relation with "Being-Itself." For Tillich, to speak about "Being-Itself" one cannot speak literally but only symbolically, which is not entirely either subjective or objective.

It will be shown that in Gadamer's "dialogical" thought, truth value has been lost, for example, because of the separation of human and natural sciences (e.g., in the substitution of natural dialogue for artificial), particularly as they relate to either polarity of subjective and

objective thinking. Grounded in Platonic-Aristotelian as well as Heideggerian thinking, Gadamer rejects any simple notions of interpretive method and presents "understanding" as linguistically mediated happenings of tradition. It will be shown that in his rejection of attempts to found understanding on any method or set of rules, Gadamer develops his philosophical hermeneutics as an account of the nature of understanding that shows the non polarity of subjective and objective thinking. It will be argued that whether it is the abstracted aesthetic judgment that has become merely a subjective response or the search for objectivity that has led the understanding of texts to become alienated from contemporary situations, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic is an attempt to erase the experience of alienation.

Paul Tillich's 'Religious Symbol' as a Participation in the Infinite

Introduction:

This first section of the thesis is a careful analysis of and critical response to Paul Tillich's notion of symbols in general and religious symbols specifically. Most of the efforts will be given to an elucidation of Tillich's understanding of symbols as a response to the question, How does nonliteral language qualify as adequate (both cognitively and existentially) in Tillich's consideration of the infinite?[1] After a brief consideration of Tillich's essential theological perspectives a more clearly defined examination of religious symbols will be made.

As a response to the greater question of the adequacy of nonliteral language, this thesis will consider the nature, function and limitations of religious language and Tillich's placement of religious symbols at the centre of his theological thinking. It will be shown that religious language may be both meaningful and factual but qualified primarily in a metaphysical way, a result being Tillich's religious symbol. It will be shown that through religious language one may encroach upon and even participate in an experience of transcendence as a dialogue beyond finitude (that is

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[1]That exact question was not explicitly stated by Tillich but serves as a foundational question as to why Tillich provided work in symbolism. Tillich characterized his theology as apologetic or as an "answering theology." See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1964), 1-8. On the one hand, theological authority, the source of theology, is necessary. On the other hand, the situation or whole expression of the world-view or mind-set of a society must be analysed. In this dialectical approach the authority (in most cases the Bible) supplies the content of theology but the expression of it will be determined by the questions of the culture. Fundamentally speaking, neither task may be accomplished without an adequate way of expression or interpretation. For Tillich the task is necessarily accomplished through the religious symbol. Therefore, it seems appropriate to ask, How does non-literal language qualify as adequate? Adequacy is achieved in so much as language facilitates meaning, an understanding of theological authority (with its own symbolic representations) and is able to plum the depths or analyse particular "present cultural symbolic meanings." Without an adequate language, how could any talk of transcendence be accomplished? In addition to his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich develops "symbol" in his major texts and a number of articles. For example, see further *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957); *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols," and "The Religious Symbol," in Sidney Hook, ed., *Religious Experience and Truth* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 3-11 and 301-321.

not finitely restricted to literal interpretation), an experience of the infinite in which a legitimate event of interaction (mystical but somehow intelligible) between a person and the concern of their faith may occur. What, in short, is Tillich's way beyond the finite?

There is nothing of the Christian story that leaves one with the impression that there is nothing left to be said. Neither scripture, tradition nor exhaustive scholarship can articulate the transcendental reality to which they point in such a way that there is nothing left to be disclosed. While this may seem obvious, the tenacity of a scientific culture has greatly undermined this notion. Literal-minded prejudice would have essential religious linguistic forms such as metaphor, analogy and symbol extinguished by an assuming enlightened epistemology espousing a "more adequate" language with concrete meaning and significance - rarely delivering on either account. However, even the "timeless truth" of scriptures[2] must be taken as the perpetual burden of reinterpretation for a contemporary audience, which can rarely be framed in the literal and concrete, for all time, at least in totality or even majority. It will be shown that one of the major concerns for both Paul Tillich and Hans-Georg Gadamer is the continual need to conceptualize hermeneutics as that which is not bound to specific and universal "methods" nor to a finite set of possible interpretations. How, then, ought one to conceive of a modern methodological hermeneutic that is almost entirely literal-linguistically prejudicial (particularly manifest in the desire to secure the "original intent" of a demythologized text) and demands a finite understanding of a supernatural text? In the simplest of terms, one cannot. More importantly, how might one participate with a supernatural text and the transcendent to which it points? In

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[2]Scripture is stated in the plural because the general principles of both Paul Tillich and Hans-Georg Gadamer, when applied to sacred texts, will be shown in this thesis to reflect contextually conditioned sources to be perpetually reinterpreted regardless of religious tradition.

this first section of the thesis, Tillich's notion of the religious symbol represents a way beyond our scientific prejudices[3] as an experience in the transcendent.

Tillich contends that human "experience" transcends that which can be expressed in cognitive propositions. This is illustrated by his comments concerning a Rubens landscape, "What this mediates to you cannot be expressed in any other way than through the painting itself."[4] Following this same line of thought, that the truth of a work of art can only be "experienced" through the work, Tillich's religious symbol is, for Tillich, the essential language of faith. It will be shown that for Tillich, much like the "experience" of truth mediated through the work of art, the religious symbol alone is able to point beyond itself while participating in that to which it points.

Tillich's Theology:

In his unpublished introduction to his *Systematic Theology* Tillich reflects on some of the reasons why he waited so long to write his system. The final and most important characterization of why he waited to write was "the feeling of the personal and spiritual inadequacy for a task like a theological system, the almost blasphemous character of any attempt to give critical and constructive truth about that which transcends human possibilities infinitely . . . ."[5] Tillich's

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[3]For the sake of simplicity in the context of this thesis, the meaning of "scientific prejudice" represents the sort of scientific attitude defined by the content of its most recent theories rather than the attitude that is defined as an inquiry. It will be shown, particularly with Gadamer, that the known data are not so much the science but the systematic inquiry. In keeping with the general axiom that a proper scientific attitude is one of "inquiry" over "data," to be explored in greater detail later, an experience in the transcendent, for Tillich, will be shown to be one that cannot be clearly articulated by content (including literary representation).

[4]Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Galaxy Books: New York, 1964), 57.

[5]Paul Tillich, "Personal Introduction To My Systematic Theology," *Modern Theology* 1 (January 1985): 83.

theological considerations are not merely objectless attempts at creating an ordered and uncompromisingly rigid theological system around mere abstractions nor attempts to speak exactingly coherent and logically about the "completely other." Instead, Tillich recognizes (as he did in relation to the painting) the impossibility of speaking concretely about the real object of theology and proceeds to offer an analysis and description of how to manage some of the difficulties that manifest in any transcendental prospectus that must deal with human restrictions. As one of the leading theologians of the twentieth-century, Tillich reflects a profound and unorthodox approach to religious experience and thinking concerning an ineffable mystery.[6] Heavily influenced by phenomenological method, as evident in his emphasis on consciousness and experience, and existential thought, as evident by his self-questioning, Tillich's theological system takes seriously the problems of human estrangement, not only from the perspective of whom we ought to be as beings (for example, our personal moral failures), but from a concern for the "ground of being" which infinitely transcends human possibilities. Among many of his achievements, his work has resulted in a distinctive theory of religion and religious symbols.

Tillich's self-description is of one in a conversation between himself as a "Christian theologian" and himself as a "humanist non-theologian."[7] His self-description manifests itself in his works, which are efforts to break through both "the religious as an authoritative realm of

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[6]While it may not be clear from the onset, his theology is strongly rooted in the Biblical materials, "for the Bible is . . . the original document of the answer . . .," but what he does with them is highly unorthodox in many ways. (Ibid. 87)

[7]Tillich, "Personal Introduction To My Systematic Theology," 84.

being distinct from human experience (heteronomy),"[8] and "the religious as an alienating concept in order to affirm the authority of human experience as the ground of its own possibilities (autonomy)."[9] In an ontological sense Tillich the theologian and humanist is "grasped" by a question like, What is religious experience at its most fundamental level? It will be shown that, in a profound sense, Tillich the theologian and humanist have been "grasped" by the experience itself, rather than a grasping by the questioner. In his dialectical system, his conversation through which affirmations and negations truth is discovered, Tillich is,

> neither on the side of those who have no affirmation from which to answer, but only tentative results of so-called empirical inquires. Nor is his place on the side of those who in the power of revelation and faith live in an unapproachable and unattackable castle build by the Biblical word and the ecclesiastical witness.[10]

In bold, perhaps aggressive, steps, Tillich's Christian-humanist dialectic attempts to move beyond many of the traditionally troublesome and excessive dichotomies in which truth is either entirely scriptural or entirely natural as an "answering" that is both theologically and socially conditioned. His work is toward an interpretation of the religious as a "dimension of depth and ultimacy" (explored later). It will be shown that Tillich's theology is clearly existential in tone and in its most broad sense is nothing less than an attempt to find something that is of "ultimate concern" from a necessarily "whole being" point of view that does not attempt to impose artificial epistemological boundaries. How do humans experience transcendent possibilities of meaning?

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[8]Charles L. Sabatino, "An Interpretation of the Significance of Theonomy within Tillich's Theology," *Encounter* 45 (Winter 1984): 23.

[9]Sabatino, "An Interpretation of the Significance of Theonomy Within Tillich's Theology," 23.

[10]Sabatino, "An Interpretation of the Significance of Theonomy Within Tillich's Theology," 85.

What prompts an awakening to the dimensions of depth and ultimacy? How may we conceptualize these experiences that give significance without demonizing or secularizing them? Tillich responds to these cardinal mysteries with the religious symbol as a way beyond the finite.

Estrangement:

Tillich's approach to the problems of Western religious tradition does not begin with the question of the existence of God; in fact Tillich believes that such a question should not be asked.[11] Instead, he begins with what he believes to be the human predicament. Mackenzie Brown, in his introductory section on Tillich's theology, asserts that for Tillich, ". . . the primary problem is our situation, our sense of estrangement and the tension in which we live."[12] Tillich's theology is well known and has been thoroughly criticized for its panentheistic world-view in which God is not "a" being nor even a supreme Being, but is the "ground" or "power" of all being.[13] In this sense, all of existence is grounded in "being" which is both finite and infinite, and from which human existence has become estranged.

Tillich's existential estrangement is an estrangement from the ground of all there is, and in response to this estrangement he calls for the courage "to be" in spite of our estranged existence

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[11]"Thus the question of the existence of God can be neither asked nor answered. If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence, and therefore the answer - whether negative or affirmative - implicitly denies the nature of God. It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, not *a* being." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 237.

[12]MacKenzie Brown, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*. First Dialogue. [book on-line] (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978, accessed 29 September 2002); available from http://www.religions-online.org/cgi-bin/relsearchd.dll/showbook?item_id=538; Internet.

[13]For example, see Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 190. In Tillich's panentheism, God is the ground of all being but is not a being. God is the force that causes all things to exist but he does not exist. To be clear, God is in all things and somehow all things are in God but God transcends and is more than all things.

toward non-being.[14] In light of this problem of essential estrangement, Tillich both clarifies some of the dangers that lead toward it and, more relevant to this thesis, he explores the nature of the religious symbol as a way of overcoming alienation from "being-itself."

Tillich believes that many religious systems are dangerous sources of estrangement when they become rigid and inflexible, that is, when they are unable to address anew the meanings of their symbolic life in relation to the "ultimate." Consequently, it is essential that one find a way of restoring the meaning of religious symbols that have been lost to technological, literal-minded prejudices, "bourgeois ways of life, nationalism, and the quasi-religions."[15] Reflecting Tillich's thought Brown writes, "Continuous individual research for the deepest meanings of rituals and symbols is absolutely necessary to preserve the vitality of religion."[16]

Both "estrangement" and "freedom" are important themes in Tillich's thought. Not only has humanity become estranged from the "ground of being" but the individual is estranged from its ideal or "essential" self. For Tillich, we intuit or sense estrangement in our consideration of whom we believe ourselves "to be," and whom we believe we "ought to be," particularly in relation to the dimension of ultimacy. Our essential nature continually reminds us that we belong to a dimension that transcends us. Tillich writes, ". . . we do not belong to ourselves but to that

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[14]"God as being-itself transcends nonbeing absolutely. On the other hand, God as creative life includes the finite and, with it, nonbeing, although nonbeing is eternally conquered and the finite is eternally reunited within the infinity of the divine life. Therefore it is meaningful to speak of a participation of the divine life in the negativities of creaturely life. This is the ultimate answer to the question of theodicy. The certainty of God's directing creativity (Providence) is based on the certainty of God as the ground of being and meaning. The confidence of every creature, its courage to be, is rooted in faith in God as its creative ground." Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 270.

[15]Brown, Dialogue Two.

[16]Brown, First Dialogue.

from which we come and to which we return - the eternal ground of everything that is."[17] His response to our "estranged selves" and our "essential selves" takes the form of a moral imperative of love. He asserts that "Love is the drive toward the reunion of the separated; this is ontologically and therefore universally true. . . . It is the 'blood' of life and therefore has many forms in which dispersed elements of life are reunited."[18] In *The Protestant Era*, love is clearly conceptualized as the power of reunion and the "New Being" as the basis for community - Tillich's answers to the future of Protestantism. Tillich's ideal ambition is to have one become a new being in a love that manifests in reconciliation and recognition of "ultimate concern"[19] for the unconditional "ground of being" itself. In *The Protestant Era* Tillich expounds his concept of love:

> I have given no definition of love. This is impossible because there is no higher principle by which it could be defined. It is life in its actual unity. The forms and structures in which love embodies itself are the forms and structures in which life is possible, in which life overcomes its self-destructive forces. And this is the meaning of ethics: to express the ways in which love embodies itself and life is maintained and saved.[20]

It would seem that to overcome through love implies a freedom toward accepting recovery from estrangement. Freedom, in Tillich's account, is the total reaction of our centered

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[17]Paul Tillich, *My Search for Absolutes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 96.

[18]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 143.

[19]Phrased in his earlier writing as: *Das, was uns unbedingt angeht* ("that which matters to us unconditionally") and *Richtung auf das Unbedingte* ("directedness toward the unconditioned"). Robert P. Scharlemann, "Paul Tillich," in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 14. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), 531.

[20]Paul Tillich, "Ethics in a Changing World," *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 177.

being and is our ability to receive or accept, but not to produce, "the ecstasy of the ultimate concern."[21] (see more in next section) To overcome through freedom and somehow - it is unclear in Tillich's work precisely how this happens - come into relation with the "ultimate concern" in such a way that we are grasped by something outside our immediate context, dimension and control leads to an ecstasy of sorts. Thus, it is a freedom that is not absolute in contra causal power but is influenced by, and somehow even contingent upon, our desires, context and circumstances. Thus, while we are estranged from ourselves and existence itself (God) we are afforded the freedom to overcome through love and reconciliation to the ultimate of all concerns which must be toward existence itself instead of toward any "thing."

Ultimate Concern:

Unlike the concern for a God who is a personal being, which Tillich considers to be a concern for being alongside others, the concern for the ultimate is for that which transcends all that exists yet remains the "ground of being." Faith, for Tillich, as part of the religious enterprise, is the movement toward the ultimate although indefinable concern. This concern is accordingly for a God that cannot be defined by words nor even considered *a* God in the traditional sense of classical Christian theism. This is a concern not for a "being" but "being-itself" because "to be something is to be finite"[22] and the divine cannot be finite. In an often quoted passage, Tillich describes "ultimate concern":

Ultimate concern is the abstract translation of the great commandment: "The Lord,

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[21]Brown, First Dialogue.

[22]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 190.

> our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The religious concern is ultimate; it excludes all other concerns from ultimate significance; it makes them preliminary. The ultimate concern is unconditional, independent of any conditions of character, desire, or circumstance. The unconditional concern is total: no part of ourselves or of our world is excluded from it; there is no "place" to flee from it. The total concern is infinite: no moment of relaxation and rest is possible in the face of a religious concern which is ultimate, unconditional, total, and infinite.[23]

Tillich maintains that certain experiences lie at the center of all historic religions and authentic religious phenomena that he calls "revelatory" experiences.[24] What is revealed in revelatory experiences is the "infinite," an experience of something "which is essentially and necessarily mysterious . . . an infinite mystery."[25] A paradox exists in revelatory experiences where the experiences present themselves to us and are necessarily believed to be something that are ultimately real and simultaneously mysterious and ineffable. The overwhelming nature of a "revelatory experience" cannot be mistaken for the mundane or profane. "In revelation . . . the ontological shock is present and overcome at the same time. It is present in the annihilating power of the divine presence (*mysterium tremendum*) and is overcome in the elevating power of the divine presence (*mysterium fascinosum*)."[26] Tillich quotes Matthew 10:39, "He who will lose his life will find it; and he who will seek his life will lose it," and Jesus' command in 22:37, " . . . with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength," as examples of ". . . finding the

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[23]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 11-12.

[24]See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 132.

[25]See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 109.

[26]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 113.

precious jewel, something that carries ultimate concern."[27] This concern is so ontologically conditioned (a part of the structure of our being) that it must be experienced as an existential reality before one may even speak of it.[28]

The "ultimate concern" is both objective and subjective in condition (object and attitude). It is clearly subjective in so much as it is the concern of the person toward something in an *unconditional manner* and it is objective in so much as the person is concerned *unconditionally about* something. Tillich's "ultimate concern" is a compelling notion of human possibility where one does not simply have a theoretical abstraction or a purely practical ability, where the two may be confused or isolated, but is the possibility of a phenomenological sort, a centered act of the whole self that cannot be merely objective in character. To be open to the ultimate is to be open to possibility. Religious possibility is played out in the interplay of these two independent but related sides of object and subject, which Tillich calls "correlation." "For example, the certainty of the state of being unconditionally concerned plays against the doubt whether the object that elicits that concern is really unconditional." The final resting place for this correlation is the ultimate truth, "the one that no one possesses."[29] Again, this correlation reflects a strongly dialectical character in which there is a continual questioning as to the ultimacy of the concern (for example, that it has not become demonic) - a perpetual openness to the questioning of the subject (one's experience) and subject-matter (the object of experience).

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[27]Brown, Dialogue Two.

[28]Brown, Dialogue Two.

[29]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 98.

In a revelatory experience a person (or persons) is "grasped" by an "ultimate concern" and its correlating element is the establishment of a religious symbol as its objective referent. It will be shown later that the religious symbol has an element of objective reference to a finite reality while simultaneously going beyond the finite and allowing the individual to participate in the transcendent to which the religious symbol somehow points. What is the experience of "ultimate concern?" It is the centered act of the whole being moving, as faith, toward the ultimate truth which no one may possess but may be represented and participated with through the religious symbol. "Ultimate concern" is that which determines our being or not-being, not physically but as ". . . the reality, the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence."[30] Perhaps the most appealing aspect of Tillich's concern is the elimination of the subject-object division in the experience of the ground of our own being. God is not an object that we may know or fail to know but is "Being-itself" in which we participate as whole persons (rather than being merely possessor of scriptural truth data or empirical facts). Ultimate religious concern is an expression of our relationship to Being and the journey of overcoming existential estrangement.

Profanization and the Demonic:

If, as Tillich asserts, God is the ground or source of being and is not simply another being (or even the highest or supreme being), then God does not exist in the sense in which things exist within the world. Instead, God is conceptualized as a concern and trust in the ultimate rationality and righteousness of the whole cosmology or scheme of things. It seems as though Tillich has found faith to be equivalent to our ultimate concern and having an ultimate concern to be a part of

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[30]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 14.

our humanness. Consequently, the question, for Tillich, seems not to be whether or not we have faith but what kind of faith we have. If the content of our faith is truly ultimate then we can say that our faith is legitimate. If our ultimate commitment is directed toward that which is not ultimate then idolatry results, or worse, the demonic emerges. When particular symbols and ideas are absolutized they become idols in themselves. Tillich perceives two immediate dangers for both what he considers as quasi-religions and religions proper. "Thus we are faced by two opposing dangers: on the one hand, what we may call secularization (although I still prefer "profanization") - a process of becoming more and more empty or materialistic without any ultimate concern; and on the other hand, demonization which makes one particular religious symbol, group, usage, world view - or whatever - absolute."[31]

Throughout his entire theology Tillich endeavours to protect against demonization and secularization. His solution is that the reinterpretation of symbols and myths must be revitalized so that we may avoid these traps. For Tillich, the reinterpretation of symbols and myths (as the symbolic manifests itself within their narrative) may be done not only within but outside the church through exposure to contemporary art and literature. He states:

> I have found that my relationship to the visual arts and to drama and poetry and the novel has made it possible for me to offer fresh interpretations of the Christian symbols. . . . But we must be careful about one thing: we should not confuse the artistic symbolization of religious symbols with the religious symbols themselves, thus implying that art can replace religion.[32]

Tillich's "ultimate concern" raises some interesting questions. For instance, Can the

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[31]Brown, First Dialogue.

[32]Brown, Dialogue Two.

"ultimate" be literally understood? What does ultimate *literally* mean? The problem of speaking about God and religious experience becomes evident the more one attempts to expound or communicate information about God or describe religious experience - particularly if one argues that the primary basis for belief in God is found in experience. The necessity of establishing a workable or reliable language that concerns itself with transcendent matters is important. Instead of abandoning language as a tool of religious expression, Tillich defends the special meaning inherent in symbols. He argues that symbolic language (religious symbol) alone is able to express the ultimate because it alone participates with the power of transcendent reality and opens us up to new levels of experience and meaning. (see next section) Michael Simpson correctly points out that "The conception of religious symbolism is central to the theology of Paul Tillich since it embodies the epistemological basis of his thought and thereby conditions each part of his theological system."[33]

Introduction to Religious Symbols:

Much like the terms "post-modernism," "existentialism," and "conservatism," the use of "symbol" and "symbolism" has become so widely applied that it is arguably ambiguous. Similar to the many overworked terms that have swept through large disciplines such as mathematics, chemistry, engineering, literature, psychology, religious and theological studies, et cetera, the multifarious applications of "symbol" have made it increasingly difficult to derive meaning from it. However, as already noted for Tillich, among increasingly ambiguous and impoverished terms the

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[33]Michael Simpson, "Paul Tillich: Symbolism and Objectivity," *The Heythrop Journal* 8 (January 1967): 293.

notion of "symbol" stands alone as a key hermeneutic tool and as a way beyond the finite prison of literal interpretive prejudices.

The influential grip of Logical Positivism and scientific empiricism can be felt in a great deal of training and teaching across disciplines. Surprisingly, even in seminaries there is a faint impression that one ought to generally disregard that which cannot be methodologically proven and consider it as *mostly* irrelevant. The use of analogy, metaphor or the symbolic can sometimes be presented as merely decoration for what can otherwise be explained in more concrete terms. Arguably, there has been a continued move toward literal reinterpretation and demythologizing where the symbolic claim of meaning and significance is left behind as an irrelevant way of "speaking novelly" and meaningfully to a contemporary audience. However, it will be shown that literal-minded prejudice has more in common with the death blow of religious experience and genuine dialogue than it does with sharing fresh and meaningful thinking concerning the divine.

In contrast to the literalising of many religious ideas, Tillich argues that symbols are indispensable in language and that they represent the *only* way in which we may be opened up to understanding new levels of reality and meaning. Ultimately, if we are to speak of God at all it must be thoroughly symbolic in character. Tillich writes:

> There can be no doubt that any concrete assertion about God must be symbolic, for a concrete assertion is one which uses a segment of finite experience in order to say something about him. It transcends the content of this segment, although it also includes it. The segment of finite reality which becomes the vehicle of a concrete assertion about God is affirmed and negated at the same time. It becomes a symbol, for a symbolic expression is one whose proper meaning is negated by that to which it points. And yet it also is affirmed by it, and this affirmation gives the symbolic expression an adequate basis for pointing beyond itself.[34]

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[34]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 239.

Lonnie Kliever has identified three prominent positions concerning the religious symbol: symbolic reductionism (Feuerbach, Freud), symbolic realism (Tillich, H.R. Neibuhr, Polanyi, Macquarrie) and symbolic formalism (Cassirer, Langer, Toulmin, van Buren).[35] Tillich's symbolic realism points to what is by its nature transcendent of the world. It is toward that which is ultimately beyond the human and the finite which can never be fully objectified. Following his notion of correlation, Tillich interprets religious symbols in relation to the existential questions they ask. Through an analysis and interpretation of how humanity has understood itself in a given period or culture Tillich believed he could disclose some of these questions of existential priority.[36] Much like his quest for interpretation, Tillich finds that questions are expressed in works of science, law, morality and art but must remain to be interpreted to find their questions concerning the meaning of being.[37] In many ways Tillich considers his interpretations or reinterpretations of traditional Christian symbols to be superior because they give expression to "the existential situation" of modern humanity.[38] Scharlemann writes:

> Human existence, Tillich said, is itself a question - that is, it has the structure of being open to something beyond it and complementary to it - but the way in which that question is formulated changes from time to time. To interpret how it is being asked in a given situation is the task of the analysis of culture.[39]

Tillich's contention is that, "What religion has to do and is doing now, largely in the

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[35]See further Lonnie Kliever, "Alternative Concepts of Religion as a Symbol System," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 27 (Winter 1972): 91-102.

[36]Scharlemann, 531.

[37]Scharlemann, 531.

[38]See further, Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 47 ff. and 59ff.

[39]Scharlemann, 531.

theological world, is to rediscover that everything religious is symbolic."[40] The central ambition of Tillich's consideration of the religious symbol in his theology should not be summarized by calling it a linguistic tool or grammatical method. The religious symbol, for Tillich, is both embraced and embraces us as we come back from an estrangement toward an understanding of the infinite as an existential reality far beyond mere linguistic analysis or grammatical correctness. The Enlightenment ideal of objective rationality will necessarily fail to appreciate Tillich's presentation of the symbol.

Distinction Between Signs and Symbols:[41]

Some of the worlds greatest minds, including Plato, Descartes and Spinoza, have been consumed with fascination for the clarity and precision of mathematical language and mathematical symbolism. Sciences such as chemistry, physics and engineering all employ the use of symbols and yet the accuracy of claiming mathematical precision as symbolic creates a fundamental disjunction in Tillich's thought - a problem of essential distinction.

Tillich argues that symbols enrich our language and allow us to give new meaning that cannot be formulated in any other way, including mathematical language. What might be intuited by the religious thinker, but must be made explicit, is that the sort of symbolism evident in the "hard sciences" is not at all the sort Tillich is concerned with. In fact, he argues that it has been

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[40]Paul Tillich, "Religion and its Intellectual Critics," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 1995. Online edition by John R. Bushell, http://www.religion-online.org.

[41]The following five step outline is adopted from Tillich's article, "The Nature of Religious Language." See Paul Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," originally published in *The Christian Scholar* 38 (September 1955), cited hereafter from reproduced version in Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, 191-199; see also *Dynamics of Faith*, 41-43.

the confusion of mathematical signs with the idea of symbols that has caused difficulties in their respective understandings. "The mathematical signs are signs which are wrongly called symbols."[42] Tillich considers the claim of mathematical or scientific signs, as the highest accuracy, to be false. Instead, mathematical or scientific signs are less informative than religious symbols.

Tillich's notion of symbols stands in clear contrast to signs. He believes that the singular common characteristic between signs and symbols is that they point beyond themselves to something else. He writes, "The red sign at the street corner points to the order to stop the movements of cars at certain intervals. A red light and the stopping cars have essentially no relation to each other, but conventionally they are united as long as the convention lasts."[43] Signs are used whenever one desires to identify an object in the physical world, usually employing letters and numbers in words, e.g., a rock is an arbitrary sign which stands as the name for an object but the sign *rock* does not participate in the reality of that to which it points. The essential and precariously defining character of a symbol, and its distinction from a sign, is its participation in the reality it symbolizes. For instance, a crucifix is a simple construction of wood which to those familiar with the Roman civilization was a sign of a disgraceful death. However, for the Christian believer the crucifix has become characterized as something far more than a sign, e.g., the symbol of Christ's atonement.[44] One has only to see the crucifix engraved on a medieval knight's shield or today hanging as an icon at the centre of a cathedral or church to understand

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[42]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 192f.

[43]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 41.

[44]Strictly speaking the crucifix is a sign-symbol. It began as a sign and then adopted the qualities of a symbol.

that there is a deeper sense of symbolism involved; symbolism beyond being merely a sign for death or even a sign for new life, et cetera.

During the recent military campaign, "Operation Iraqi Freedom," as Americans entered Baghdad they began removing various icons of Saddam Hussein (as well as in other areas of Iraq). Some of the soldiers were instrumental in removing a large statue of Saddam in one of the major parks of the city. During the removal process, one of the soldiers placed an American flag over the head of the statue. The crowd and particularly the media reacted strongly to the symbolic gesture. In response, the same soldier removed the American flag, interpreted by some as a gesture of American colonialism of sorts, and replaced it with an Iraqi flag. Both the statue and the flags represent the sort of meaning that can be symbolically experienced.

What once stood for power and perhaps even dignity in the statue of Saddam no longer holds the same significance, but the symbolic meaning manifest by the nationalistic spirit of the people in opposition to the American flag placed over the statue and the cheers of pleasure in seeing their own flag represents more than merely a sign of regime change. The Iraqi flag participates in the power and dignity of the nationalism of the people for which it stands.

The statue example illustrates another point, namely, that a symbol is characterized by its longevity in a given culture or convention. For example, the total removal of the crucifix, as a primary Christian symbol, would be fundamentally difficult barring a radical reorientation of the faith and/or an abandonment of essential beliefs. The present iconoclastic attitude in Iraq against symbols of the previous regime illustrates both the possibility and the difficulty in changing a long standing symbol of a given culture's leadership. While many of the icons of Saddam Hussein have

been removed there are some Iraqis who still fear the power it symbolized. In comparison, a sign is relatively easy to replace. A symbol carries a fullness of meaning that necessarily goes beyond that of a sign and which cannot be exhaustively and explicitly stated. Tillich's continual emphasis on the religious symbol is that it introduces us to realms of awareness that are participatory rather than simply speculative. In succinct form Elizabeth Johnson defines Tillich's symbolic realism as that "which understands religious symbols as nonliteral representations of a transcendent reality, which so mediate that reality that it is disclosed and communicated through the symbolic and (in the judgment of one influential group of symbolic realists) experienced in it . . . ."[45]

The Function and Birth of Symbols:

In this subsection my underlying question is, How does religious language function differently than normal language in Tillich's theological thought? According to Tillich, the symbol is born to open up levels of reality in new and meaningful ways. He presents a twofold manner of openness. First, symbols open up levels of external reality which are otherwise closed off from us. For example, Tillich appeals to the external reality that "only" the arts can reach through their created symbols. "All arts create symbols for a level of reality which cannot be reached in any other way. A picture and a poem reveal elements of reality which cannot be approached scientifically."[46] Second, symbols open us up to a new internal reality, ". . . dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality."[47] A novel or a

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[45]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Symbolic Character of Theological Statements About Mary," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (Spring 1985): 320.

[46]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith,* 42.

[47]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42.

theatrical play is not only entertaining but it can open up the hidden depths of our own being. In Tillich's account, one cannot be existentially freed until one embraces (participates in) the meaning presented by symbols. However, it is important to note that one cannot understand meaning apart from symbols. The participatory event in which one embraces and is embraced by the symbolic will necessarily remain tied to the finite objective referent.

Tillich suggests that each epoch in human history unconsciously discovers its own symbols. Cultural symbols, unlike artistic symbols, cannot be produced intentionally and not by individuals. They are born of the "group unconscious" or "collective unconscious."[48] Unless a symbol is accepted within a given culture's given epoch it, religious symbol or not, simply cannot function because it has not been born of that era. "Like living beings, they grow and they die. They grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes."[49] Also, once a symbol has been born of a given context it cannot be replaced with other symbols. In contrast, the fundamentally conventional character of signs is that they are consciously invented and removed while symbols remain as long as they are meaningful to the "collective unconsciousness." Tillich writes, "In this way, all of the polytheistic gods have died; the situation in which they were born, has changed or does not exist anymore, and so the symbols died. But these are events which cannot be described in terms of intention and invention."[50] Unlike cultural

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[48]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 194.

[49]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 43. For instance, Tillich contends that the symbol of the virgin Mary has died, in part because "the ascetic element which is implicit in the glorification of virginity" no longer has a prominent role in our culture. See further Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[50]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 194.

symbols, the artistic use of the symbolic may appear more transient or fluid in nature (intended and invented) but even those symbols are often marked by larger cultural shifts that are reflective of convention of sorts but are less arbitrary than just signs, for example, Cubism, Expressionism, Impressionism, et cetera. While the explicit difference between artistic and cultural symbols (religious or otherwise) remains somewhat vague, the major defining characteristics of opening new levels of reality (both external and internal) as well as their generally "fixed" nature in regard to signs, provides an important step for Tillich's hermeneutic. His "answering theology" must be one that is continually attuned with the "collective" of the society in which it finds itself.

The Nature of Religious Symbols:

Much like other symbols, "religious symbols" open up new levels of otherwise hidden or estranged reality, in keeping with Tillich's assertion that "only" through the symbolic can we overcome estrangement and encounter new levels of reality. Unlike other symbols, "religious symbols" open up "the depth dimension of reality itself." Tillich writes:

> We can call this the depth dimension of reality itself, the dimension of reality which is the ground of every other dimension and every other depth, and which therefore, is not one level beside the others but is the fundamental level, the level below all other levels, the level of being itself, or the ultimate power of being.[51]

The analysis and examination of the religious symbol is of primary importance for Tillich's philosophical and theological thinking. Toward the end of his life Tillich acknowledged his overriding apologetic and passion, "My whole theological work has been directed to the interpretation of religious symbols in such a way that the secular man - and we are all secular -

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[51]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 194.

can understand and be moved by them."[52] Tillich's presentation of the religious symbol is the expression of an existential commitment to a way of life. They are means of preserving the ultimacy (the highest priority among possible concerns) of ultimate concern (the proper referent of our concern) and in so far as they succeed in an openness (to new levels of reality) they achieve their existential role (overcoming estrangement and brining us into relation with "Being-Itself").

Tillich's "religious symbol" seems to be a common aspect of human history which is full of diverse cultures that have given birth to symbols of ultimate reality (symbols of the divine). To many groups or cultures belong certain symbols that are appropriate or fitted to them uniquely. In a society where a monarchy is paramount it should come as no surprise to see God personified as the King above all kings, enthroned in Heaven above all other thrones.

The Old and New Testaments are replete with stories of worship and veneration concerning "religious symbols." One of the dangers of the symbolic, such as personifying God as King, is that the unconditional concern represented by the symbol can, and often over time does, become absolutized. Tillich recognizes a very real danger where ". . . concepts designating ordinary realities become idolatrous symbols of ultimate concern."[53] As previously noted, Tillich openly denies that any finite reality can express God directly and properly; even God's own name

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[52]Brown, First Dialogue.

[53]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*. 43.

is transcended by God.[54] Accordingly, even the use of God's name may become blasphemous.[55] The only way for faith to adequately and safely express itself is through the symbol and yet even the symbol may become plagued with a fixedness or rigidity that it should not have.

Though the religious symbol is not without its failings, one may appropriately wonder if the death of some symbols has left our culture impoverished. Have we too quickly dismissed our symbolic heritage for a literal and scientifically conditioned language? While this question may seem apt, it implies a volition of sorts that cannot directly apply to symbols. It is important to note that the death of specific symbols is not due to scientific or practical criticism directly, but due to an ethos of sorts. Again, symbols die because they no longer produce the responses they were born to express. Where the ideal of God as the King of kings has become less and less appropriate with the fading of thematic elements of kingship in general, the culture has had no deciding vote in which the collective chose an alternative "literalised" concept. Instead, in many cases the culture, for example North America, has become the parents of an unchosen scientifically predicated realism. The collective "unconsciousness" seems to have adopted fewer and fewer symbols of what Tillich might call "ultimate concern." It is altogether plausible that

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[54]It will be noted later that Tillich holds that there must be at least one unsymbolic or literal expression of God.

[55]Other philosophers have picked up on that idea. Aquinas states, "On the contrary, It is said in the person of God: 'I am Who I am.' (Ex. 3:14)" Aquinas considered the name "He Who Is" or "I am Who I am" to be the most proper of God. From that name the *essence* of God is most clearly shown to be "his own existence." As presented in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Online Version: Benziger Bros., 1947.), Book 1, Question 2, Article 2. The name "He Who Is" signifies not form but existence itself. God's essence is existence, as noted by Aquinas in previous questions. God alone is existence in his essence, no other thing may be aptly "of itself" as everything else is "dominated by its form." "I Am Who I Am" is God's unique self-subsisting nature. "He Who Is" is a unique term for a unique essence. God is his own existence, without form and timeless.

cultures replace the symbolic with the literal because the culture no longer has need of responses or expressions that symbols alone produce but unconsciously. If that is the case with North American culture (with all its diversity) one might begin to wonder if it has unconsciously denied the need of opening up new levels of reality, the sort of transcendental reality Tillich is thinking about, or if it has abandoned the sort of courage "to be" in the face of estrangement and become content with a relation with "being" instead of the "ground of being." This is conjecture, of course, but is nevertheless an interesting question. In an age marked by an increase in spiritual interest but denial of formal religions the place of symbols in general and religious symbols specifically has become increasingly difficult to recognize.

It is important to recognize the possibility of symbols becoming absolute. Religious symbols point to that which they represent, and do not constitute the totality of the thing. Symbols may participate in "the Holy" but they themselves are not "the Holy." If they were, the transcendence of the Holy would be compromised. In Tillich's thought, the key to any symbol is that everything in reality can impress itself as a symbol within a special relationship between the human mind and the symbol's own ultimate ground and meaning. Everything that is in the world is encountered as it rests on the ultimate ground of being (Being-Itself). Religious symbols point to that which transcends "all that is" using finite material and because the symbol must be both "negated and affirmed" (it is both true and yet untrue) the possibility of the mind to only affirm the finite may make the symbol absolute. A symbol becomes demonic the moment it is elevated to the unconditional and ultimate character of the Holy itself. In Tillich's words, religious symbols ". . . must express an object that by its very nature transcends everything in the world

that is split into subjectivity and objectivity. A real symbol points to an object which never can become an object. Religious symbols represent the transcendent but do not make the transcendent immanent. They do not make God a part of the empirical world."[56]

Tillich accepts the need to inquire into the characteristics and functions of religious symbols from within but at the same time he is placing the investigation in a more critical philosophical context. That is to say, "Theologians must make explicit what is implicit in religious thought and expression; and, in order to do this, they must begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely, that God is being-itself or the absolute."[57] His idea, as presented and presupposed, is that theology must make something clearer. In effect, there is a higher mode or expression of objectivity through clarification than that presented by the religious symbol without clarification. Correspondingly one may wonder if religious symbols have a higher expression of objectivity when they are coupled with philosophical and theological clarity. It does not appear as though Tillich wants to replace symbols with theological or philosophical inspection on their own, however, it is clear that he diligently reflected and desired continual interpretation of symbols, particularly the important symbols of Christianity. Ultimately, he sought a unification of both religious and philosophical objectivities with the clearest communion possible. In short, symbols express primary religious meaning after which a secondary stimulation of thought should follow (philosophical and theological reflection, and interpretation).

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[56]Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," in *Myth and Symbol* (Edinburgh and London, 1962), 17.

[57]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 265.

Levels of Religious Symbols:

In this subsection my underlying question is, If religious language is nonliteral can there be gradations of adequate religious discourse? Tillich contends that there are two main levels in religious symbols. First, there is the transcendent level, which goes beyond empirical reality (physical existence). Second, there is the immanent level, which is within a more readily conceivable reality. The basic transcendent symbol is God, however the transcendent itself, as God, is not a symbol.[58] It is important to distinguish two elements in the idea of God. First, there is a non-symbolic element in our image of God, ". . . he is ultimate reality, being itself, ground of being, power of being . . . ."[59] As well, there is a symbolic element, e.g., God as a person. Following the symbolic and non-symbolic characterization of God, one may say that God is thus symbolically a person but is really not a person at all, i.e., is actually the ground of being. Though God is not a person, Tillich contends that we must symbolize and encounter God ". . . with the highest of what we ourselves are, *person*."[60] Using the symbol of "person" we allow ourselves to express an understanding of God in the terms of the highest qualities we experience of ourselves, e.g., love and mercy. Tillich believes that we may preserve the divine and transcendent as well as that which we experience as persons in symbolizing God as a person. Tillich writes:

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[58]Tillich frequently states that there is one non-symbolic statement about God, namely, that God is "being-itself" or "Absolute," e.g., *Systematic Theology*, 239. "Of course, it should never be said that God is a symbol, because the term 'God' implies both the God beyond God, or the ultimate ground of being, and at the same time the particular expression. Only the latter has the character of a symbol." Brown, First Dialogue.

[59]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 196.

[60]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 196.

> If we preserve only the element of the unconditional, then no relationship to God is possible. If we preserve only the element of the ego-thou relationship, as it is called today, we lose the element of the divine-namely, the unconditional which transcends subject and object and all other polarities.[61]

In all these ways, Tillich is showing how the language of either objectivity or subjectivity is less adequate than that of personification, i.e., the religious symbol which has both elements of "unconditional" and "ego-thou" relationship. He writes, ". . . in the notion of God we must distinguish two elements: the element of ultimacy, which is a matter of immediate experience and not symbolic in itself, and the element of concreteness, which is taken from our ordinary experience and symbolically applied to God."[62]

Always and without blind acceptance, the religious symbol must be maintained consistently with an open declaration that it is not literal. For instance, one cannot maintain an elevated discourse on God's qualities of strength or knowledge literally or it would lead to absurdities, for example, if one took the statement "God sent his Son" literally one would be speaking of the absurd, for Tillich. However, if one is willing to accept the statement symbolically it becomes a profound declaration of the Christian faith. Again, to be clear, in Tillich's account literal statements are not more adequate than the symbolic, they are less.

Christianity speaks not only of the incarnation of God but also of the continued presence of God within the world. Tillich believes that the Christian sacraments are one form of symbolic modes of this expression. The Lord's Supper and baptism are symbolic but to say this does not imply that they are only signs pointing to past events. Rather, they continue to participate in the

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[61]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 196.

[62]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 46.

Holy they symbolize. If they only pointed to past events they would be characteristically signs. Instead the sacraments, in some indefinable way, participate with the Holy. "If we speak of those dimensions of reality which we cannot approach in any other way than by symbols, then symbols are not used in terms of 'only' but in terms of that which is necessary, of that which we *must* apply."[63]

The Truth of Symbols:

In this subsection my underlying question is, How are we to verify true or false statements about God? Tillich claims that symbols are immune to, or independent of, empirical criticism. Though this claim, *prima facie*, smacks of an audacious attitude rather than a reasoned argument against something like positivism, Tillich's idea is fairly simple and well founded. Empirical criticism deals only with the literal sense of terms and does not address the symbolic function of language. Again, that is only true if we contend that the symbolic goes beyond literal language and opens up new levels of understanding, and that a symbol can only die when the situation in which it has been born has passed away and not because of some sort of logical or empirical criticism.

Tillich's "truth" of a symbol is perhaps best measured in terms of "adequate" and "inadequate." A true symbol is one that succeeds in its role of opening up new levels of reality and corresponding levels of self-understanding. "Their truth is their adequacy to the religious situation in which they are created, and their inadequacy to another situation is their untruth."[64]

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[63]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 197f.

[64]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 199.

How adequate is the ontological relationship between the symbol and that which it represents? An adequate symbol makes readily apparent that which it symbolizes but to be "apparent" is the response to questions concerning the meaning of being and consequently is not cursory. Religious symbols become the answers to existential questions when they are able to convey what is of ultimate concern. Again, to be clear, the symbolic ability to convey concern represents a courageous attitude toward the possibility of being, in spite of non-being, and is the correlation of one's whole act of being. In many ways, Tillich's religious symbol is similar to Rudolf Otto's analysis and description of what is experienced in the numinous consciousness in his *The Idea of the Holy*. The "religious symbol" seems to be Tillich's response to the questions of how we are to conceptualize transcendent meaning in relation to the meaning of our being and how we are to move beyond the finite.

Tillich, Aquinas and Ricoeur:

This subsection is a comparison and contrast of Tillich to Aquinas and Ricoeur in order to better clarify Tillich's unique notion of the religious symbol. A consideration of some of their leading distinctions is not without merit, particularly as this examination illuminates Tillich's symbolic distinction.

Tillich argues that the symbol speaks to us at the fundamental level of our being. He argues that religious language may be both rich and meaningful but it may also be idolatrous and even demonic. "Religion is ambiguous and every religious symbol may become idolatrous, may be demonized, may elevate itself to ultimate validity although nothing is ultimate but the ultimate

itself; no religious doctrine and no religious ritual may be."[65] Once more, Tillich's symbol speaks to us in ways which literal language is incapable of doing and allows us participation in ways that cannot be clearly articulated.[66] Consequently, Tillich's concept of religious language must be qualified in an abnormal way, for example, in terms of participation and revelatory experience rather than in normative terms adapted to methodological sciences. Of course, where such a normative expression of language existed certain symbols would conceivably be born which reflect its deepest concerns, presuming that such a society still held some esteem for ambiguity and transcendent relation.

In an age of "literalistic thinking," where explicit and literal language is honoured as more truthful, it is tempting to deconstruct the symbol to its most literal form. However, while this tenacity in rejecting the religious symbol may possibly reduce the complexity of language it will invariably close off levels of meaning and essential ways of apprehension. Not only is symbolic language more meaningful than literal language, where the symbol is "merely" symbolic, but Tillich's major contention is that symbols have an irreplaceable function whenever one speaks of the profoundest layers of human understanding and "being-itself."

In a similar attempt to work out the mystery of religious language, though clearly not emphasised as a "participatory" symbolic theory like Tillich's, Thomas Aquinas argued that religious language is always analogical, namely, that it conveys truth but not literal truth. Aquinas

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[65]Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," 199.

[66]One of the leading failures of Tillich is that he did not explicate a clearer understanding of "participation."

believed that we could not avoid analogy because all statements will be predicated analogously of God.[67] In his consideration of divine names Aquinas confronts a number of analogical issues. He argues that divine names cannot be purely equivocal. How could we claim anything intelligible about God? Nor can divine names be purely univocal. How could we expect to bridge the vast gap between God and ourselves? Consequently, words used for God must be analogical (different but related) - neither equivocal (used with quite different senses) nor univocal (always used with the same sense). Aquinas writes, "If, then, nothing was said of God and creatures except in a purely equivocal way, no reasoning proceeding from creatures to God could take place. But, the contrary is evident from all those who have spoken about God."[68] How ought one to understand the "mean" between the purely equivocal and purely univocal?

Both Aquinas and Tillich represent middle road approaches in which neither person is willing to invoke either extremes of equivocation nor univocation. To be clear, Tillich's symbolism is fundamentally univocal in the sense that it rests on at least one literal statement of truth but it does not solely rest there, it goes beyond the literal. Unlike Tillich, Aquinas attempted to explore the middle road between univocity and equivocity without a univocal foundation of God as "being-itself." Aquinas understood that one may speak analogously of God and in some sense say something meaningful and significant, however, he also understood that the proportional aspect of what one "cannot say" is far more prevalent in any discourse of the

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[67]Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* (Benziger Bros. edition: translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947), for analogy refer to Book 1, Question 13, articles 9 and 10. See *Summa Theologica*, Book I, Question 13, article 5, for Aquinas' doctrine of "analogical predication."

[68]Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles* (translated by Anton C. Pegis. New York: Doubleday-Image, 1955), 1, 13, 15.

transcendent. With a similar attitude, as already noted, Tillich approaches his systematic theology as one who encroaches on blasphemous talk in any consideration of the infinite. One cannot help but to intuit a sense of the "profound" in the thinking of these men. Their object of worship is "profoundly" transcendent and yet they have hope of speaking, even if that speech be "profoundly" inadequate.

Tillich's approach seems more reasonable to accept with its foundational univocity because it seems to protect one from falling into complete equivocacy. That, of course, is not to claim that Aquinas fell into that problem but merely to say that the possibility exists more readily in his account. Aquinas's work on analogy presents a profound step in the thought of nonliteral religious discourse. In some ways Tillich considered his symbolism to be a reiteration of Aquinas' analogy. Tillich writes:

> If the knowledge of revelation is called 'analogous', this certainly refers to the classical doctrine of the *analogia entis* between the finite and the infinite. Without such an analogy nothing could be said about God. But the *analogia entis* is in no way able to create a natural theology. It is not a method of discovering truth about God; it is the form in which every knowledge of revelation must be expressed. In this sense *analogia entis*, like 'religious symbol' points to the necessity of using material taken from finite reality in order to give content to the cognitive function in revelation.[69]

In a minimalist sense, there must be at least one non-symbolic representation upon which to make sense of all others. How could one know that everything was a symbol if one did not know at least one thing which was not a symbol? Tillich seems to address this problem by claiming that God is non-symbolically "being" or the "ground of being." He writes:

> Theologians must make explicit what is implicit in religious thought and

[69]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 145-146.

> expression, in order to do this, they must begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely, that God is being-itself or the absolute. However, after this has been said and nothing else can be said about God as God is not symbolic.[70]

If Tillich's approach has a single literal foundation, as argued here, is it enough to facilitate an adequate religious language - particularly if the foundation of "being-itself" is unclear? In as much as both Aquinas and Tillich attempted to address notions of transcendence without sacrificing too much to the literal they have avoided demonizing. If the choice is between equivocal or univocal, Tillich represents a middle ground, much like Aquinas, which is meaningful though somewhat obscure, i.e., both flexible and creatively open.

Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor elucidates some of the central concerns that have been presented thus far.[71] Ricoeur calls the assumptions of the traditional rhetorical tradition into question and offers a different theory of metaphor. His conceptualization of metaphor is not merely a way of embellishing, but is a new way language is meaningful - particularly as it goes beyond analogy, e.g., that many metaphorical statements would be simply absurd if taken even partially literal ("A mighty fortress is our God!"). Of course, religious language has become so heavily imbued with the symbolic, analogical and metaphoric that a clear distinction between them is highly improbably, if not entirely impractical.

The relationship between metaphor and symbol is often expressed as the difference between a literary and nonliterary phenomenon. Part of the challenge in unpacking those terms is

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[70]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 239.

[71]See further Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," from Crossan, John Dominic, ed. *Semeia 4* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 75-78.

distinguishing how each author employs them. However, even then there is considerable overlap and repetition between ideas. Each linguistic conception, be it analogous, metaphoric or symbolic is essentially based on a similar dynamic of expressing the extra-finite by way of association with the finite - or at least of opening up a level of understanding or experience in a way literal language does not easily facilitate. Each also expresses the way one finite reality is similar to and different from another. Regardless of the ambiguity and interplay the subtle nuances of each adds a great deal to the experience of meaning and language.

Two important conclusions emerge from Ricoeur's work. First, a metaphor is "untranslatable." It is untranslatable because it is not merely a substitution of one word for another but it actually creates meaning. Second, a true or good metaphor is not merely decorative but includes new information and new ways of speaking about or comprehending reality. Ricoeur argues that metaphors function outside the ordinary literal reference of the words themselves and point toward a new reference of reality and experience. Similar to the claims of Tillich and Aquinas, Ricoeur claims that reality is not limited to that which can be described literally. Ricoeur's "metaphor" opens one up to the world of people, love, beauty, value, et cetera. This world of metaphor must be clearly distinguished from the world of objects. In all three accounts, religious language is possible only if the literal (absolute) meanings of words are surpassed in which an opening up new levels of reality and experience occurs.

Concluding Rumination on Tillich's Symbol:

One of the more difficult issues raised regarding symbolic language concerns the changing "collective unconscious" as a condition of changing human experience. What does it mean when

the dynamic nature of one's culture causes the efficaciousness of a religious symbol, as it participates in the Holy, to fail? If this is the case, as already noted in the death and birth of the symbol, how might one resolve this as not being indicative of a changing God? Tillich addresses the problem by noting that changing cultures speak about the changes in people not change in God. He writes:

> Religion should also accept one of the most powerful criticisms of the intellectual, namely, that the symbolic material is changing because the relationship to the ultimate is changing. Not the ultimate concern about God himself is changing, but the concrete forms are changing. And when you ask, "Is that valid also of the Christ?" then I would say, "It is not, because Christ in sacrificing his temporal and special existence did not bind us to any special forms of symbolism but transcended them and became the spirit on which the church is based."[72]

Another leading difficulty, if not the single most important, concerns the meaning of God as "being-itself." What is the meaning of God as being-itself? Within his panentheistic world-view, whenever one experiences or encounters a personality one is encountering God. God is the cause of all personality while simultaneously not being an entity with which one can have a personal relation.[73] However, Tillich's account of "being" by itself remains an elusive and unclear concept. Aquinas stated that the proposition "God exists" is not self-evident.[74] He contended that God is evident *in* and *of* himself (God is his own existence) but that God is not self-evident to us. In the proposition "God exists" the subject (God) includes the predicate (existence) but we cannot fully comprehend "God" as subject (particularly his essence). Consequently, we are unable

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[72]Tillich, "Religion and its Intellectual Critics," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 1995.

[73]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 245.

[74]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 2, 1.

to understand how "existence" necessarily follows from God's *being*. Aquinas made efforts to articulate proofs of existence to demonstrate that which would have been self-evident if we could understand the subject - God. If Tillich relies on God as the "ground of being," as the literal truth which underpins all other symbolic language, it is essential that the literal truth be somehow evident to us. To his ends Aquinas attempted proofs while Tillich seems to have appealed more to the sense of overcoming existential estrangement in "the having of good experiences" as a sort of evidence - a coming to know the "being" as encountered in personality and the symbolic. Still, it is unclear what the meaning of "being-itself" is or how the symbolic is reflective of or upon "being-itself."

Further, the criterion of openness, as experienced in the symbolic, is somewhat undefined as a participatory event. Tillich contended that a symbol is adequate when it opens up levels of reality and points beyond itself to the ultimate. John Losee raises the question, "How can one know if a symbol is apprehended in that way?"[75] Tillich does not provide specific criteria of participation. Tillich only seems to indicate that a symbol is effective if it is effective.[76] The encounter or participation with the symbol, as it opens up levels of reality and the ultimate, is unclearly defined by Tillich, although by the nature of such an event the "ontological shock" would seem to make it difficult to mistake. Losee writes:

> Tillich's 'answer' is that a symbol either is, or is not, apprehended in this way [new levels of reality], and that no criterion of the ontological situation produced by a symbol can be given. . . Tillich's claim that a symbol is effective only if it manifests

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[75]John Losee, *Religious Language and Complementarity* (New York: University Press of America, 1992), 189.

[76]Losee, 190.

> ontological power is reducible to the unhelpful claim that a symbol is effective only if it is effective.[77]

Finally, the earlier discussion concerning the theological and philosophical reflection on the symbolic needs further clarification. If the task of theology is to examine or reflect upon the symbol, can theology take the place of symbols or fully express their meaning? While Tillich would not want theological or philosophical reflection to be segregated from the symbolic, he clearly does not believe they could take the place of symbolism. Conceivably, in a literal minded culture, the tendency would be to move away from the symbolic and rely on our reflections of them, thereby moving closer to the literal and the less ambiguous. Arguably, that tendency would serve to erode significant and essential aspects of our existential selves when we encounter the "other," as seen in Tillich, Aquinas and Ricoeur.

Conclusion:

Does the poet, theologian, philosopher and the like, add meaning with the symbolic or merely appeal to our emotions?

Arguably, language is reason's instrument. If one desires to be reasonable one must employ language in some capacity. In the normal sense of language, the more clearly defined and less ambiguous it is the more useful it is. However, if language is the communication of intelligible information and if one desires to use language with religious content it seems necessary to work through the inherent ambiguity or limitations of religious language. Tillich powerfully argues that the ambiguity or limitation of the symbolic is liberating and meaningful in ways more

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[77]Losee, 190.

effective than literal language. As a general axiom, religious language is called into contention whenever one holds that all meaningful statements are verifiable or falsifiable by empirical observation or by exacting definition. Tillich, Aquinas, and Ricoeur all help show that those qualifications are too narrow.

The symbolic avoids the danger of deconstructing religious "claims" through linguistic analysis alone. It allows us to combine mysteries of faith and expressions of their truths in the form of language. Many may maintain that symbols are "merely" symbols whereas those familiar with religious or theological studies see symbols as rich in meaning, not to mention those who may be familiar with the participatory event of religious symbolism. If we allow the scientific mind-set or the tenacity of a demythological mind-set to co-op language then religion may become little more than empty emotion.

Symbolism addresses the existential understanding where I can understand my experience with the transcendent in so much as I see something similar to my own experiences. With the symbolic I am both taken beyond myself by the unfamiliar, into something new, and yet I remain in the familiar by the familiar - both anchored to the sameness I know and free to the new. We cannot grasp the full transcendent content represented by symbols but we can, in some ways, participate with the symbol as it also participates with the Holy.

Tillich's religious symbol is neither too constrictive, isolating me to my own ordinary experiences, nor too uncritical, creating an antinomian experience of relativity - there are limitations. Tillich's symbol addresses the drive for a more comprehensive theory of language while addressing the inherent limitations in symbols. Ultimately, whether it is Tillich's symbolism,

Aquinas' analogy or Ricoeur's metaphor, the nonliteral speaks to us at the most fundamental and vital points of our lives as a way beyond the finite.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

Since coming to prominence in the works of those such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, the discipline of hermeneutics has recently and most profoundly developed into a broader discipline through the thinking and works of Martin Heidegger and later in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[78] Beginning as a specific discipline in biblical exegetical studies in both Protestant and Roman Catholic schools of thought, hermeneutical thinking has moved beyond the traditional emphasis on an author-oriented approach.

The traditional views, sometimes called the literal-grammatical, historical-contextual, historical-critical method, et cetera, usually define interpretation in terms of discovering the meaning(s) intended by an author and the understanding of the original audience. An essential aspect of these approaches includes the strong consideration of the historical situation through a remodelling of the transaction of the author to the original audience by way of the text. Schleiermacher and Dilthey are often cited as exemplars of this tradition of "author oriented" hermeneutics. In response to these traditional hermeneutics came the charge, among others, that

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[78]Grant R. Osborne, paraphrasing material from Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 323, writes:

> Paul Ricoeur traces three stages in the development of hermeneutics (1973:112-41). The classical period depended upon a classification method that utilized a genre-based approach to the text. Then Schleiermacher and the neo-Kantian movement along with Dilthey erected an epistemological base for hermeneutics, characterized by a diachronic interest in history. Finally, Heidegger along with Gadamer took an ontological approach, centering on the synchronic problem of being. The search for meaning partakes of that 'alienating distanciation' (Gadamer) that characterizes human reflection and so present hermeneutics faces a dilemma of understanding that demands a new approach.

See further, Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 433.

methodological hermeneutics are often guilty of reductionism, that is, of taking immensely complex events or materials and considering them under rubrics of either mind, context or tradition, without a more comprehensive approach. This criticism is evident in Martin Heidegger's thinking, particularly as he questions the "meaning of Being" and in Gadamer as he relates understanding to the universal structure of experience. The response, by those such as Heidegger and Gadamer, supported the concern that it was no longer adequate to primarily ask questions of authorship, context and text. The dilemma of understanding history has been given the added and deeply penetrating burden of answering how we understand and consequently the way we have "being."

For most, it might seem obvious that regardless of the comprehensiveness of each approach to interpretation and understanding, all hermeneutical paradigms are bound to some sense of failure due to the dynamic nature of existence. The notion of a truly comprehensive hermeneutic seems to belay the integrity of a profoundly complex existence. Regarding the more textually bound paradigms, the difficulty of comprehensiveness seems quite apt, particularly in relation to the ontologically concerned hermeneutics of those such as Heidegger and Gadamer. Except that one retreats into naive realism or fortifies his or her hermeneutic with the hope of one day explicating the simply "un-yet" objectivised, there will necessarily be a failure of methodology.[79] For instance, Dilthey and Schleiermacher are often criticised for being guilty of

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[79]Textually concerned hermeneutics, although often perceived as narrowly demarcated to exegetical praxis, were and continue to be, sophisticated systems involving theories of symbolism, analogies and the like. In short, the tendency to consider exegetical hermeneutics as somehow biassed against deep issues of understanding can be very misleading and often untrue. Modern hermeneutics, considered here as that which arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through the work of those such as Friedrich

psychologistic attempts that include overemphasising the original author's intent.[80] If one may take such common criticisms as typical of traditional hermeneutics, as I propose one should, the response and critical assessment of the feasibility of said programs becomes all the more clear as a response against methodological reductionism. The spirit of interpretation that has followed since the author-oriented approaches no longer defines the hermeneutical circle in terms of relatively strict processes. This new wave of thought, generally known as phenomenological hermeneutics, fortified by Husserlian phenomenology, appeals to ontological perspectives. Exemplars of this new wave include Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.

Although this ontologically centered phenomenology remains somewhat ambiguous between its many definitions and popular usages, it is essentially an approach that maintains that both scientific and cultural knowledge must be derived from the structure of Being itself.[81] This approach maintains that hermeneutic thought ought (by necessity rather than moral obligation) to be concerned with wider, more embracing considerations (as a concerted descriptive effort of understanding by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, rather than prescriptive effort). Where traditional hermeneutical programs offered a great deal but ultimately rested upon methodological

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Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, often ventured further than exegetical concerns and became more philosophical.

[80]In response and opposition to what Schleiermacher perceived to be tensions created by excessive rationalization and intellectualization in religion he sought to reclaim a religious territory in a philosophic consideration of the self-consciousness of Christians. Religion is born, not of the intellect, but in the "feeling of absolute dependence." However, this "feeling" was nevertheless a function of the intellect. See further, Osborne, 368.

[81]"Being" hereafter capitalized to distinguish the unique consideration of human "being" from other "beings."

failures that could not offer the sort of relation to understanding that many thought possible, the "ontological turn" hopes to offer a comprehensive and aggressive universality as a general theory of understanding. For instance, Paul Ricoeur suggests that hermeneutics can be traced back to Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* and that this work represents a general theory of human comprehension.[82] In short, the primary impetus of the "ontological turn" is driven by basic epistemological and anthropological issues[83] beyond the historical horizons of the text and its author.

Although modern hermeneutics have become far more than a search for adequate principles, methods and rules needed in the interpretation of texts and particularly sacred texts, it would be a mistake to suppose that these new hermeneutical agendas have done away with systems of critiques and control methods, particularly those limited to biblical materials. It is enough at this point to merely point out that the possibility of doing hermeneutics has gone much further than the interpretation of written texts, the focus on communication with or the psychology of another person, and is now characterized as the search for/of that which constitutes

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[82]Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 4.

[83]Van A. Harvey notes three major reasons why hermeneutics has been rekindled within the modern sphere. "(1) new theories of human behaviour in the psychological and social sciences in which human cultural expressions are regarded as manifestations of unconscious and instinctual drives or reflections of class interests; (2) developments in epistemology and the philosophy of language that have led to claims that what counts as reality for a given culture is a function of the linguistic structures superimposed on experience; and (3) the arguments advanced by philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger that all human experience is basically interpretative, and that all judgments take place within a context of interpretation mediated by culture and language behind which it is impossible to go." See Harvey, "Hermeneutics," *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (vol. 6. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1987), 280.

the event or phenomenon of understanding in itself.[84] As such, the field and discipline of hermeneutics have taken centre stages in many areas outside that of the sacred and outside textual interpretation. To be clear, it seems to be unfeasible, according to those such as Heidegger and Gadamer, to claim mastery over method nor appeal to a process of exegesis as the primary criterion for truth.

Gadamer,

Originally published in 1960, *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*) has the dual purpose of confronting narrow views of scientific method as the sole route to truth and providing an extension of Heidegger's Da-sein ontology. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic describes a shift from conceptualizing "understanding" as a methodology of the humanities toward a philosophical "universality" of understanding and interpretation. The fundamental ambition of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutic is *not* to provide norms and rules for interpretation. That tenacious attitude, the search for norms and rules, typified by traditional preoccupations in various hermeneutical programs or methodologies, has been abandoned for a more phenomenological analysis of the inherent structure of understanding itself, that is, an attempt to describe the basic mode of experiencing and understanding by virtue of its ontological determination. Gadamer's use of Heidegger's event-structure or "event-ontology" in the revealing of truth as well as his idea of understanding as the "fusion of horizons" represents a significant step in conceptualizing both

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[84]Van A. Harvey defines hermeneutics as ". . . the intellectual discipline concerned with the nature and presuppositions of the interpretation of human expressions." See further, "Hermeneutics," 279. For the sake of simplicity and coherence, this broad definition will be implied hereafter, unless otherwise indicated.

truth and meaning in a comprehensive model. It is a model of truth and meaning determined by existence and prior to method. His ideas have poignantly helped to usher in a new generation of thinking.

Gadamer's hermeneutic cannot be divorced from its "universality" as the concern for understanding that is comprehensive of all experience - particularly experience of art, historical experience, and experience of philosophy. More than merely conceptualizing an otherwise obscure field of study, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic offers insight into the structure of understanding and consequently a challenge to any that might claim to be enlightened and aware of what it means "to be" and how we think of language and tradition. Regardless of whether one finds Gadamer's hermeneutic to be convincing or not, his reactionary concerns to the alienation created by the bifurcation of human and natural sciences cannot be ignored. His work toward a hermeneutic of ontology that stresses language and tradition, as well as his overall concern for the precariousness of understanding represents a landmark for the study of hermeneutics.

Truth and Method is a large and complex work that weaves together a great amount of philosophical tradition under Gadamer's years of scholarship. For the sake of coherence and ease, *Truth and Method* is probably best outlined in terms of his critique of Kantian-based aesthetics, his critique of the methodological historicism of Dilthey (including his forerunners in Romantic hermeneutics) and his exploration of language as the vehicle for interpretation and understanding.

First, Gadamer shows, through concepts like "Kultur," "common sense," "judgement" and "taste" that the Enlightenment's ideal of scientific knowledge has actually divorced access to ". . . practical knowledge, to knowledge that would help one understand how to act in a given

situation, to know what is right and good."[85] As the human sciences began to model themselves after the natural sciences, doing away with subjective notions like "common sense" for the more objective or "practical knowledge" for the theoretical, Gadamer believes truth value was lost. Through the experience of philosophy and the experience of art, Gadamer maintains that he has found "the most insistent admonition" for the self-recognition of scientific consciousness to recognize its own limits. "The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away."[86] *Truth and Method* begins with Gadamer's attempt to free the aesthetic consciousness and its conception of truth that has been circumscribed by scientific notions of truth. In a highly controversial move, Gadamer desires to defend the experience of truth that comes through the work of art and in so doing aligns significantly with Tillich's own concerns. His hermeneutic connects this experience of truth (of art and philosophy) so as to better understand what the human sciences are "beyond their methodological self-consciousness" and relates them to the "totality of our experience of the world."[87]

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[85]See James S. Hans, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hermeneutic Phenomenology," *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978): 4.

[86]Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 2nd revised edition, 2002), xxiii.

[87]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxiii.

Martin Heidegger's Ontological Hermeneutics,

Although influenced by Dilthey, Heidegger, in *Being and Time*,[88] argues that Dilthey, among others, was unable to overcome the subjectivistic tendencies of Western thought since Descartes. Heidegger believes these tendencies have led to a dilemma in epistemology and an enticing preoccupation with the ideals of the natural sciences and technology. Heidegger, perhaps the most influential philosopher of the 20th century, desired to go beyond Edmund Husserl's essentialist approach and to answer the question concerning the meaning of Being. What is it, to be? His existential analytic of Da-sein became an attempt to ask, What kind of "being" do human beings have?

Heidegger rejected the notion of objective historical knowledge because Da-sein is "thrown into" a world in which language, culture and institutions of life are already given. Human "Beings" are thrown into a world not of their making which consists of potentially useful things, both cultural and natural things, which come to us from the past but are used in the present for future goals. Thus he saw a fundamental relationship among the mode of being of objects, humanity and the structure of time. Being is the historically conditioned individual that is aware of itself and the passage of time. In his "step back" from traditional metaphysical thinking Heidegger believes he has made possible a new revelation of Being through attunement. He considers artists and poets to have a privileged access or relation to the attunement of Being. He often looks for a new beginning that thinks more originally than metaphysics, in artistry and

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[88]Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, Joan Stambaugh, trans. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996). *Being and Time* originally published in 1927.

poetry.[89]

Humanity, in Heidegger's view, has fallen into a state of crisis due to its parochial approach to the world through technologically conditioned ways of thinking and its ignorance of the question of the meaning of Being (that which underlies existence). Modern society, for Heidegger, fosters a particularly manipulative attitude that he contrasted with the ancient Greek concept of Being.[90] Subsequent philosophers, since the Greeks, have covered over and/or lost the deeper understanding of Being achieved by the Greeks.

According to Heidegger, human existence itself has a hermeneutical structure that underlies all our interpretations, including those of the natural sciences. Being exists in time with conditioned understanding from previous understanding. Truth is not an objective grasp of meaning but an unveiling of Being through the medium of language.[91] Historically conditioned Da-sein interprets by bringing prior understanding into the future. Heidegger writes:

> In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is to be understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.[92]

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[89]During his early career he was interested in the world, tools, moods, self questions, et cetera. Later, he focussed more on the need for creative experiences, a more true experience through poetic expressions. After 1930, Heidegger focussed more on the interpretation of Western conceptions of Being. For instance, this shift can be seen in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 1953), Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[90]See further, Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

[91]For instance, Heidegger's now famous statement, "Language is the house of being."

[92]Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 179.

Heidegger's ontological hermeneutic is perhaps one of the single most provocative works in twentieth-century thought. As a lasting legacy, Heidegger's thought cannot be avoided in the questioning of human understanding. It is not surprising, therefore, to see a great deal of Heidegger's influence worked out in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer and Heidegger,

Like Heidegger, Gadamer begins with the axiom that all understanding is hermeneutic. That is, the hermeneutic function (which should not imply method or mechanism) is our basic mode of being-in-the-world. Understanding is neither a methodological concept nor an "attempt to provide a hermeneutical ground for the human sciences . . ." but is "the original characteristic of the being of human life itself."[93] The hermeneutical circle not only describes the encounter one has with historical texts but also the encounter one has with the world. While the hermeneutical circle may describe a structure of sorts, this does not imply that the circle is then "formal." Gadamer writes, "The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter."[94] Gadamer's hermeneutical circle is the structure of understanding itself that cannot be reduced to formalism but is the description of the perpetual movement of tradition and interpreter in a "fusion of horizons."

Philosophical hermeneutics is not concerned with unlocking the proverbial "lock of past meaning" but is, instead, concerned with establishing a dialectic between the past and present, the

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[93]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 259.

[94]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.

text and the interpreter.[95] To do this he primarily appeals to language and tradition. Following his teacher, Gadamer recognizes that one's present horizon, one's knowledge and experience, is the productive ground of understanding where, conceptually, one's present horizon can be transcended through exposure to another's linguistically encoded cultural tradition. Breaking with Heidegger, Gadamer's historicism, arguably leading to a sense of relativism, stresses continuity and accepts the major premises of historicity and the finitude of humanity, thus recovering a tradition Heidegger avoided in an attempt to question Being anew. Although stressing the linguisticality of the hermeneutical event, like Heidegger, where language is at the heart of all understanding,[96] Gadamer is able to work outside "Heideggerisms" (Heidegger's unique philosophical characteristics) to create his own idiosyncratic philosophy particularly through his emphasis on tradition. Unlike Heidegger, Gadamer's approach to tradition was not as

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[95]Osborne writes concerning Gadamer's 'fusion'; "There are not two (interpretation and understanding) or three (with application) separate aspects in the hermeneutical enterprise but rather one single act of 'coming-to-understand.'" See *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 371. Osborne's observation seems correct because for Gadamer all understanding has the structure of an experience, in which language, understanding, interpretation, experience, tradition and effective-history are all bound together to form the universality of the hermeneutical experience. For an example of "fusion" see further, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 388.

[96]Gadamer places language as the universal medium in which understanding is realized. See particularly the third part of *Truth and Method*, Chapter One. The experience of language is clearly central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, to the point of being inseparable from thought. There are no wordless experiences. He writes:

> Language and thinking about things are so bound together that it is an abstraction to conceive of the system of truths as a pre-given system of possibilities of being for which the signifying subject selects corresponding signs. . . . Experience is not wordless to begin with, subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather, experience of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word - i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing - so that in it the thing comes to language. Even if we keep in mind that this does not imply any simple copying, the word still belongs to the thing insofar as a word is not a sign coordinated to the thing ex post facto. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 417).

an endless series of mystification that require de-mystification, but as an essential element of understanding that conveys truth deeply rooted in history.

The Universality of Hermeneutics,

Gadamer's central contention, within his larger portrait, is to sketch out an understanding of understanding, a search for the axiomatic backdrop to our "common experience" - a hermeneutic to all life experiences. Key in Gadamer's thought are the sciences' "unassailable and anonymous authority" and the central role of language to understanding.[97] What *prima-facie* appears as an attack on the scientific mind-set must be clarified. Any condemnation involved in his apparent attacks on the sciences must be considered regarding the specific mind-set which reflects a given set of principles, for example, a narrow route to truth with a broad-based acceptance. Gadamer is not attacking science in the genuine endeavour for ingenuity, discernment, productivity, et cetera. He is careful to make the disclaimer that ". . . the problem cannot appear as one in which our human consciousness ranges itself over against the world of science. . . ."[98]

Gadamer has a limited respect for traditional hermeneutics, with the bulk of his endeavours breaking free of the traditional in search of something unbroken by artificial epistemological boundaries. To be sure, philosophical hermeneutics is the search for understanding that is more than avoiding misunderstandings and takes into consideration the

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[97]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* David E. Linge, ed. and trans. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1st paperback edition, 1977), 3.

[98]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 10.

"horizons of the past."

Gadamer's hermeneutic boldly contests worship of the inflexible scientific mind, particular to its own worship of supposedly unbiased approaches and prejudiceless methodologies.[99] Gadamer reaches beyond 'mere avoidance' and claims that the hermeneutical experience is one of possession: "by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true."[100] The universal hermeneutic task of speaking must be "genuine speaking" which seeks words that reach others without "prearranged signals." Even as we embrace our conditioning prejudices,[101] from which we are open to the world, Gadamer maintains that "Our task . . . is to transcend the prejudice . . . that has been restricted to a technique for avoiding misunderstandings and to overcome the alienations present in them all."[102] As an example, Gadamer considers the image of two lovers engaged in communication and questions their effectiveness of engagement.[103] It becomes a question, for him, of whether they are actually communicating with words, which

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[99]"Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something - whereby what we encounter says something to us." Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 9.

[100]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 9; he further writes:

> There is always a world already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganization itself in the upheaval. Misunderstanding and strangeness are not the first factors, so that avoiding misunderstanding can be regarded as the specific task of hermeneutics. Just the reverse is the case. Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world. (15)

[101]"It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being." Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 9.

[102]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 8.

[103]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 16.

presumably reach one another with significance, or if they are communicating with signs from the industrial age (founded on science), which presumably result in a form of pseudo-communication (some lesser form of communication).

His universal approach to hermeneutics is best summed up in his own words:

> Now if what we have before our eyes is not only the artistic tradition of a people, or historical tradition, or the principle of modern science in its hermeneutical preconditions but rather the whole of our experience, then we have succeeded, I think, in joining the experience of science to our own universal and human experience of life.[104]

Gadamer's Hermeneutic of Fusion,

The structure of the hermeneutical experience is characteristically like that of an event. Within Gadamer's hermeneutical experience, that is, through the "linguistic" fusing of the objective and subjective, new horizons of possibility are opened that are rooted in the present and "effectively" conditioned by the past. This exposure or "fusion" is the opening up of a subject's horizons to another's horizons and subjectivities. Interpretation and understanding, or as Osborne pointed out "coming-to-understand", are arrived at by a gradual and perpetual interplay between the subject-matter and the interpreter's initial position, that is, one's own horizons and the horizons of a text. Gadamer's interpretation of history and thought denies that there is a single objective true interpretation transcending all view points and simultaneously denies that we are restricted to our own viewpoint. "Coming-to-understand" is never a static and absolute experience but is an interplay involving real risk taking, the universality of which binds together tradition, experience, interpretation, and our effective-history in the comprehensiveness of the

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[104]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 13.

hermeneutical experience.

Gadamer forcefully argues that the objective, particularly as idealized in scientific method, can only provide a limited degree of certainty and can never capture the "intended" or "original" meaning of the text, there will always be something outstanding (unsaid or disclosed). Gadamer writes, "To understand it does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said."[105] This is true because ". . . texts do not ask to be understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers. . . . What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationship."[106] This "new relationship" of interpretation is not merely an "act of one's subjectivity" but a historical act that is a placing of oneself within a process of tradition where past and present is constantly fused. Gadamer contends that all of life reflects this dialectical movement.[107] To truly experience this reflection for oneself involves a giving over of self to the event and by doing so allowing the subject-matter, for example a text, to speak for itself. That is, to allow a text to speak one must be prepared to be confronted by the new and the unexpected - an experience that is negative because it is somehow unpredictable (these themes are explored later in Gadamer's notion of "play" or "game"). While simultaneously giving oneself over to be grasped by the hermeneutical event one is also incorporating or assimilating the subject-matter

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[105]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 391.

[106]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 395.

[107]Agreeing with Hegel, Gadamer argues that all "experience has the structure of a reversal of consciousness and hence it is a dialectical movement." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 354. Gadamer also argues that, "Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation." (356)

into one's own horizon. There is always this sense of reciprocity in Gadamer's thought concerning "fusion."

The challenge of this experience manifests itself to the degree in which one is willing to lose himself or herself in the play of the structure of understanding. The willingness of the interpreter to interject one's own historically situated understanding, including all the fore-structures of understanding, with the experience (according to itself, which stands outside our manipulation) of something alien that challenges and modifies our fore-structures of understanding, directly influences the ability of the individual to understand the experience and consequently to allow the fusing of personal and extra-personal horizons to take place. The experience itself is both dependent upon the willingness of the person (as an intention) and the structure of the experience (determined by "being" and prior to our intention).

Gadamer's emphasis on participation excludes the possibility of the individual being a third party objective observer, outside the hermeneutical event itself. It is a place one goes and willingly engages in their own prejudices as they allow the experience to confront them. By authentically giving oneself over to the event or experience of understanding the scientific approach becomes more and more inaccessible. It is the "fusion" itself that is the source of experience and understanding and not primarily the subject and object. This is the essential character of Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutic, where the consciousness is focussed upon a "fusion" that one has given himself or herself over to. Parallels between the structure of self-consciousness, experience, understanding and life itself have been drawn very close together almost to the point of non-division, but certainly to the point of blurred distinction. By stressing

these aspects of his hermeneutic Gadamer hopes to overcome the scientific attitude, the objective attitude of method and the subjective attitude in which each individual creates reality.

In short, through language and upon the basic mode of being-in-the-world which is "understanding," Gadamer argues that one lives in a world which is subjective but nevertheless has a fundamental reality, prior to our subjectivity, that our projected horizons must fuse with to achieve understanding. "All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language."[108] It is the "play" between the world of linguistically encoded reality and the historical "givenness" that represents the "coming-to-understand" of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic.

Functioning Tradition,

The two large moves in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* include his emphasis on the mediation of all understanding as linguistic and through tradition, which is itself linguistic (tradition cannot be thought of as non-linguistic because all understanding is linguistic). Concerning this tradition James S. Hans writes, "To admit that we have a tradition through which we understand is simply to admit the obvious: that we are all situated towards the world in a particular way, with particular familial and societal horizons, and with a given body of language at hand which has a long history behind it, which always precedes our coming into the world."[109]

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[108]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 389.

[109]James S. Hans, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hermeneutic Phenomenology," *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978): 10.

Each society has its tradition and each is found in language. To understand a language, for Gadamer, is to understand a tradition. Tradition, or history, represents the filter through which one sees the world. He writes, "To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible."[110] Gadamer's explication of what it means to have a tradition does not admit to the obvious. In many important ways Gadamer's notion has far more to do with what it means to be "grasped by" tradition rather than to "grasp at" tradition reflectively.

We are all *historically effected consciousnesses*, according to Gadamer, for which hermeneutical understanding attempts to make more structurally explicit. The conditions of prejudice, tradition and finite historicity result in Gadamer's notion of effective-history or history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). He writes:

> If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, we are always affected by history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there - in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon - when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.[111]

It is important to emphasize that Gadamer's effective-history is not a reflective process but has the structure of an experience of an ongoing process of dialogue or interpretation between past and present. Thus, we can be somewhat confident in our ability to be rational but we cannot partake of this confidence without accepting historically mediated intuitions and interests.[112]

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[110]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 361.

[111]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 300.

[112]See further, Brice R. Wachterhauser, "Prejudice, Reason and Force," *Philosophy* 63 (1988): 235.

Between the horizon of historically shaped prejudices (intuitions) and explicit reasoning, we can never be entirely clear on where we are.[113] Gadamer writes:

> One of the fundamental structures of all speaking is that we are guided by preconceptions and anticipations in our talking in such a way that these continually remain hidden and that it takes a disruption in oneself of the intended meaning of what one is saying to become conscious of these prejudices as such. In general the disruption comes about through some new experience in which a previous opinion reveals itself to be untenable. But the basic prejudices are not easily dislodged and protect themselves by claiming self-evident certainty for themselves. . . . [114]

Historically Informed Prejudice and Projected Possibilities of Understanding,

One of Gadamer's most controversial elements is his defense of prejudices. Gadamer's interpretation schema assumes a context of intelligibility in which the presuppositions and assumptions (prejudices) of the interpreter enable both understanding and misunderstanding. "A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light."[115] For Gadamer, an interpretation which holds to the presuppositionless ideal of scientific objectivity is in error and understanding which scientifically reconstructs the psychologistic intention of the speaker has failed. It is only through the mediation between the interpreter's immediate horizon and his/her emerging one that one may participate in the act of "coming-to-understand" which necessarily involves prejudices (*Vor-urteil*) or pre-judgments. Gadamer describes one's projected horizon and fore-conceptions within the hermeneutical circle and its revision when he writes:

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[113]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 235.

[114]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, ed. and trans. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1st paperback edition, 1977), 92.

[115]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 360.

> [a person] projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out of this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.[116]

It is because of our finite nature in given historical contexts and the necessity of bringing unexamined or unreflected ideas into play, to make sense of the most rudimentary of understandings, that prejudices cannot be pejoratively considered as extraneous things, but as essentially woven into the fabric or process of understanding itself.[117] Once prejudices are understood as necessary for any experience they must be examined from the perspective of experience (which necessarily includes one's historically conditioned horizon) to be judged correct or incorrect, practical or impractical, et cetera. After all, as James Hans wondered, "How would it ever be possible to understand something if we put out of play what we already knew?"[118]

Prejudicial understandings, essential for all understanding, are refined or effectively corrected by the historical gap, for example, between author and interpreter. Gadamer believes that many of the false prejudices will have time to be disclosed and overcome while correct prejudices will be carried onto successive generations. Besides being isolated to the interpretation of texts, Schleiermacher's (and Dilthey's) hermeneutic assumed that the historical and cultural

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[116]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 267.

[117]Gadamer writes, ". . . human consciousness is not an infinite intellect for which everything exists, contemporaneousness and co-present. The absolute identity of consciousness and object simply cannot be achieved by finite historical consciousness." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 234.

[118]Hans, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 12.

distance of the interpreter from the phenomena being interpreted necessarily creates misunderstanding. However, for Gadamer this historical and cultural distance can be the productive grounds of interpretation. By accepting the temporal gap as productive grounds for understanding he has taken the historical finiteness of the author into consideration in a way that has not been emphasised this distinctively before. He writes, "Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted."[119]

Accordingly for Gadamer, it is through tradition, which lives and changes, that some prejudices are discarded and others further enforced as they are put at risk. This is not to suggest that there is a point in time during which all prejudices of worth will be exhausted while those of falsity will be disclosed and erased. On the contrary, there are seemingly infinite numbers of interpretations and prejudices that are possible. Each historically rooted prejudice is influenced by untold numbers of events and untold numbers of meanings that perpetually shape it. How could one ever expect to critically evaluate and be completely objective about the conditions that conceive of prejudice? Surely, a hermeneutical approach that ignores the facts of the human context-bound nature and supports a presuppositionless interpretation exposes its own prejudice of ignorance in trying to escape preunderstanding. "To try to escape one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd."[120]

Before any experience of understanding, before we begin an enquiry into something,

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[119]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 279.

[120]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 397.

prejudice and fore-judgement will have given us a sense of how we are to approach a given subject matter. This same fore-understanding will have mediated whether the enquiry was worth our efforts at all. Similarly, Heidegger claimed that Da-sein is the being that always has an understanding of the Being of beings that shapes its comprehension.[121] Brice R. Wachterhauser has pointed out that Gadamer seems to argue that prejudices "often have a mode of existence which is categorically different than that of a theory, a belief, or a fully developed concept."[122] Wachterhauser notes that he is interpreting Gadamer's thought but concludes that it is helpful to explain why Gadamer believes we cannot objectively justify our prejudices.[123] If this is true, and prejudices are not objectively fixed and cannot be reflexively studied than are they more akin to intuitions or presentiments? If that is the case, then prejudices seem to become an aspect of the structure of our Being that cannot be dealt with in the manner it seems Gadamer desires to approach them.

Otherness,

Gadamer's acceptance of the historical gap and the finite historicity of each author's context provide the grounds for his argument that, "Not occasionally only but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive attitude as well."[124] Regardless of how small the temporal gap may be, a

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[121]Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 36.

[122]Wachterhauser, 234.

[123]Wachterhauser, 234.

[124]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296.

text can never be fully understood within the interpreter's horizon because it is always "somehow" different than the author's. Although the meaning of a text goes beyond its author this is not to imply a purely subjective or relativistic interpretation of the text. There is always a "givenness" in the horizon of the text which we must attempt to understand. Always, at the same time, the text presents us with a sense of "otherness" in which it is changing and evolving. The meanings and truth of a text are not static but dynamic. That is why Gadamer contends that tradition is living and that "the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process."[125] Thus, awareness of a text or of our past, must involve an "openness to the other" which is recognition that "I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so."[126]

The fundamentally experiential nature (understanding prior to our reflectivity and intention, determined by our ontological structure) of all understanding is characteristically open. It is openness to a question concerning its own horizons. Experience is a negative one in which the only "genuine" experience shakes us awake or opens our eyes to the new and unexpected. There is always a sense of risk in being open to the other. Gadamer's hermeneutic guards against dogmatic beliefs while giving a sense of dignity to freedom of change and progress without falling into a sense of relativism. Concerning the dialectic between person and text Gadamer writes:

> . . . one intends to understand the text itself. But this means that the interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into re-awakening the text's meaning. In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he

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[125]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 298.

[126]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 361.

> maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one's own what the text says. I have described this above as a "fusion of horizons."[127]

In interpretation a new subject-matter emerges. Early hermeneutic philosophers like Schleiermacher and Dilthey argued for an abandonment of one's own perspective when trying to understand a historical text. In contrast Gadamer argues to the contrary. Schleiermacher attempted to abandon his own perspective by placing himself in the position of the author that he might overcome or remove the spatial and temporal difficulties.[128] Dilthey wanted the historical horizons of the interpreter to be eliminated.[129] If one grants James Hans' depiction of tradition, as quoted above, and the impossibility of overcoming our finite historical "conditionedness" then it follows that we must all work from our historical location with the prejudices and fore-conceptions at hand. Hans writes:

> The emphasis on method that earlier hermeneutic philosophers had was merely the result of their unawareness of man's basic mode of being and on the futile attempts to find a way of achieving objective, universal knowledge from a historically finite position. With Gadamer such notions are laid to rest, and man is left to face the permanently provisional nature of his knowledge and his infinite openness of experience.[130]

Play and The Bankruptcy of Subjectivist Asceticism,

Gadamer's persistent objection to the radical severing of subject and object, being and

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[127]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 388.

[128]See further Richard R. Niebuhr, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst," in Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 7. New York: Free Press, 1967).

[129]See further Hans, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 11. See also W. Dilthey, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," T. Hall, trans., in P. Connerton, ed. *Critical Sociology: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Press, 1976).

[130]Hans, 12.

thinking, particularly manifest within the advent of Cartesian dualism, reflects his overarching concern with the alienation of humanity that has become, to him, the foundation of Western philosophy and the Western world. This alienating foundation is seen most clearly in narrow truth claims, of which Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is probably the most obvious example and important of epistemological forces behind natural sciences. Against said alienation, Gadamer argues for the rekindling of the ignored sphere of art and its own truth claims. Through an ontological analysis of the experience of philosophy and the experience of art, Gadamer believes he has found an experience of truth ignored by many. "The fact that through a work of art truth is experienced that cannot be attained in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away."[131] Particularly important for Gadamer's recovery and development of notions of truth and understanding, is his notion of "play" or "game" (*Spiel*). His analysis of the ontology of the experience of art borrows much from Hegel and offers itself as an analysis of the experience of truth - a participation with ourselves in our encounters with art and infinite possibilities.

In "play" one commits to a trans-personal understanding where dialogue between oneself and the work is not merely a sequence of soliloquies, where one is merely talking with onself, but an existential "leap" involving testing and risk-taking.[132] Play has the potential to overcome the

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[131]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxiii.

[132]Writing concerning the experience of the work of art Gadamer says that "Everything familiar is eclipsed." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, ed. and trans. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1st paperback edition, 1977), 101.

subject/object dichotomy in which we do not confront the game as an object but participate in it as an event - as we give ourselves over to the rules (the structure of the game). In Gadamer's "play" there is a strong sense of the transformative quality of artwork and the dislocation of our own pre-understandings - even our identity. If one encounters a genuine work of art and remains unchanged then one has not truly "encountered" the work at all. While it is a personal experience, "play" is not merely about one who plays but an experience where "all play is a being-played." The experience is not merely a sequence of intentional activities but a sort of counter intentionality or negative experience in which one is grasped by the game in unexpected ways. Consequently, genuine dialogue in the experience of "play" involves vulnerability, risk and exposure which, to be clear, is neither through passive subjective experience nor external objective happenings. Like most transformative processes, "play" involves laborious and travailing efforts. A neutral or indifferent engagement will not suffice in a Gadamerian notion of "game" or "play." To have an experience of truth in a work of art one must be willing to engage it like a game and become subject to its rules, which include the possibility of somehow losing.

Intentionally moving away from modes of abstraction, Gadamer focuses his attention on "experience" of art.[133] "My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to

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[133]"To understand what the work of art says to us is therefore a self-encounter. But as an encounter with the authentic, as a familiarity that includes surprise, the experience of art is *experience* in a real sense and must master ever anew the task that experience involves: the task of integrating it into the whole of one's own orientation to a world and one's own self-understanding." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 101-102.

play as play."[134] Our relationship to art is like "play" where we engage it and become transformed ("play" is the essence of genuine art) in which the experience goes beyond method and resists a reduction of the problem of understanding to either the subjective consciousness of the interpreter nor the originator of the work - it is a disclosure of our ontology and understanding beyond the ordinary. "Art is a special organ for understanding life because in its 'confines between knowledge and act' life reveals itself at a depth that is inaccessible to observation, reflection and theory."[135]

For Gadamer, the voice present in an experience of art is an intimate and changing encounter with ourselves (as well as the object of our attention). It is also a profound encounter with the enigmatic, the mysterious and the untamable. In his "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" (1964) essay Gadamer writes:

> The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in enigmatic fashion, a shattering and a demolition of the familiar. It is not only the "This art thou!" disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock; it also says to us; "Thou must alter thy life!"[136]

To propose that the work of art is similar to a "game" (or play) is not to simultaneously suppose an "I" and "thou" relation, where the subject comes into contact with a completed object. The game necessarily involves both the subject and object in a dialectical activity.[137] Among

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[134]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116.

[135]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 235.

[136]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 104.

[137]In his 1966 "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" Gadamer writes, "I am trying to call attention here to a common experience. We say, for instance, that understanding and misunderstanding take place between I and thou. But the formulation 'I and thou' already betrays an enormous alienation. There is nothing like an 'I and thou' at all - there is neither the I nor the thou as isolated, substantial

Gadamer's many claims the work of art "speaks to us most directly." "It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves."[138] However, in keeping with his concerns to avoid falling into either subjectivism or objectivism, he maintains that the work of art does not allow for an antinomian comprehension, free to be understood by the whim of the interpreter, but that an experience of the work of art "permits - indeed even requires - the application of a standard of appropriateness."[139] In this way, the work of art can become an object of hermeneutical investigation because it has something to "say" to us and in "saying" something it confronts us and speaks to every person's "self-understanding" - if we are willing to allow it to "say" from the excess of meaning - that is "the language of art."[140] In the refusal of the work of art to entertain certain interpretations and its excess of meaning it, the work of art holds a transcendent status beyond the work of art itself (for example, that physical picture in front of me) and beyond the realm of my own thinking (merely in my head). Gadamer's "play" or "game" represents a third sphere of understanding that takes place neither solely within us nor solely without us, and yet it most intimately presents itself and ourselves to us.

Poetry,

Art "says" and has a voice in a dialogical conversation, a fusion of sorts, as the creative

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realities. I may say 'thou' and I may refer to myself over against a thou, but a common understanding [*Verständigung*] always precedes these situations." Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 7.

[138]Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 95.

[139]Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 95.

[140]Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 101-102.

communication between the interpreter and itself. In this way, Gadamer's experience of art represents a way beyond the subjectivity fear that many see in his emphasis on our own horizon as a major aspect of understanding (historical circumstance, prejudice, et cetera). The work of art, or text, confines us to itself by its own ontology (for example, like rules of a game) and allows us to encounter ourselves as we "come-to-understand" the meaning and truth of the experience. As active participants in the "game" the experience of truth, its interpretation, is always a creative work and not merely a reproduction of the author's intentionality. This "contemporariousness" (the always present relevance) in Gadamer's understanding of truth and the experience of the work of art is best captured in his thinking on poetry. In his essay "On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth," Gadamer gives poetry a unique place because of its ability to remain separate from both the author and the interpreter and by being separate shows its relationship to truth.[141]

The poem is self-fulfilling, it stands as its own verification - "Detached from all intending, the word is complete in itself."[142] The poetic expression, its language, is able to "stand for itself" but is nevertheless the same "language" as employed in ordinary speech. Gadamer maintains that ordinary or common language points beyond itself to something else. He illustrates by describing someone who instructs another to look at a house and, in response, the other person must look

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[141]See further, Hans-George Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* Nicholas Walker, trans., Rober Bernasconi, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[142]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 107. The poetic text "enjoys greater reality than any of its potential realizations can ever claim for itself." (109)

beyond the expression (command) itself toward the house. In that way, there must be something outside the language to verify or validate the expression.[143] In contrast, the poetic expression "is autonomous in the sense that it is self-fulfilling."[144] Like Tillich's participation in the symbol, Gadamer's understanding of the experience of art necessarily involves participation in creative interpretation but the poetic expression reveals itself without external reference or appeal. Gadamer notes the analogous relationship between the experience of prayer and poetry in that both find fulfillment "by refusing external verification of any kind."[145]

Gadamer's understanding of truth, in the context of poetry, is that something remains "unconcealed" and open.[146] He goes on to explain the truth of poetic expressions by calling attention to pledging and proclamation. The poem is a sort of "pledge" (*Zusage*).[147] He considers the poetic pledge to be most obviously apparent in religious poetry since there must be a believer who will be the authentic addressee - one that accepts the promise of the text. That is, there must be two participants within a pledge, unlike a legal text in which only a "proclamation" (*Ansage*) is needed because it becomes valid when it is declared.[148] In the poetic context, there will be an

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[143]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 112.

[144]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 110.

[145]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 110.

[146]"Language is primarily not, in the familiar phrase, the means given to conceal our thoughts. This primary meaning of truth, then, is that we tell the truth, we say what we mean. This is supplemented, particularly in philosophical usage, by a further sense in which *something* "says" what it "means": whatever shows itself to what it is, is true." Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 107.

[147]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 109.

[148]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 109.

accepting person who receives the pledge and the one who makes the pledge. It is more than a communication of information but "readiness to allow something to be said to us."[149] Truth, in this context, is the relationship of giving and accepting of what the poetic expression "says." Unlike ordinary language, the poem does not require verification outside itself to be truthful, only the acceptance of it because "we construct the world of the poem from within the poem itself."[150]

Gadamer proposes that poetic language shows the highest ideal of all speech in that it has the power of "realization" in its fulfilling "of the revealing (*deloun*)."[151] It is in this profound sense of self-realization that the poem becomes what it intends, more than the author's own saying.[152] It isn't enough for Gadamer that we find the character of poetry to be timeless and unbound to the circumstances of its birth because they answer the "ultimate questions of human life."[153] Instead, the question to which every poem answers, its truth, is that it creates a "hold upon nearness."[154] Our experience of time, the perception of passing and change, reflects in our attempt to grasp at something. Eventually everything will "escape our grasp" and "fade." However, a genuine poem provides an opportunity to experience "nearness" that does not fade

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[149]"If someone is to say something to someone else, it is not enough that there should be a so-called recipient who is there to receive the information. For over and above that, there must be a readiness to allow something to be said to us. It is only in this way that the word becomes binding, as it were: it binds one human being with another. This occurs whenever we speak to one another and really enter into genuine dialogue with another." Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 106.

[150]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 112.

[151]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 112.

[152]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 113.

[153]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 113.

[154]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 113.

but "where its own presence is in play" it brings time to a stop within itself.[155] The "standing" and "nearness" of the poetic expression is a "familiarity itself in which we stand for a while."[156] Again, the intimacy previously mentioned in Gadamer's experience of the work of art and understanding, here in an experience of poetry, represents the perfect witness to the standing and the nearness that "by being there bears witness to our own being."[157]

Structure of Openness,

In "The Hermeneutic Priority of the Question"[158] Gadamer considers the logical structure of openness that he believes to be characteristic of the hermeneutical consciousness. Implicit to Gadamer's "openness" within the hermeneutical consciousness is the notion of "question." That implicitness is evident in its priority in every experience. "We cannot have experiences without asking questions."[159] Accordingly, the "openness" essential to experience has the structure of a question - experience of text or person. An understanding of "*the essence of the question*" and its relation to hermeneutical experience is not immediately obvious but ultimately rests as an essential characteristic in Gadamer's ontological analysis of all experience (art, philosophy and otherwise).

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[155]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 114.

[156]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 115.

[157]Gadamer, "On the Contribution of poetry to the search for truth," 115.

[158]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362-379.

[159]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

A question "breaks open the being" of an object.[160] The essence of a question is not antinomian or wildly relative but has a certain sense. That sense gives direction to the question, which cannot help but have a "given" sense and direction within it - it is its essence to have a sense that gives it direction.[161] The answer to any question must respond to the particular direction of the question before it can make any sense - the answer is the proper working out of a given direction. Consequently, a question that is "open" is not boundless but directed by the "horizon" of the question. "Posing a question implies openness but also limitation."[162] What is the question's horizon - its boundary limits? Might we speak of the "horizon" in its constituent elements, evolving but in some sense static? Gadamer indicates that within each question is a path for knowledge which contains negative and positive judgements where there must be some sense of reasoning between possibilities. His concept of knowledge places the question in priority over the answer. "Only a person who has questions can have knowledge, but questions include the antithesis of yes and no, of being like this and being like that."[163]

All knowledge (which is dialectically considering opposites) is mediated through the question. The "openness" in the question consists in the fact that it is not yet answered - it must be undetermined, unknown. Gadamer asserts that one of the greatest achievements of the

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[160]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

[161]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

[162]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 363.

[163]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365.

Socratic dialogues is to show that it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them.[164] There must be something new in the "openness" because Gadamer believes that to be able to ask necessitates wanting to know; wanting to know necessitates not knowing - a genuine desire to encounter the new. Gadamer wants to avoid anything that is only posing as a question and is really only an apparent question. To have asked a question "rightly" is to have come into true openness without holding to false presuppositions.[165]

In a strange and provocative statement, Gadamer claims that there is no way or method of learning to ask questions or to see what is questionable.[166] How could one expect to learn to question when questions are born of the knowledge that there is no knowledge (no present answer)? How might one learn to know what one does not already know?[167] How might one justify scientific methodology as anything more than limited if its basis for knowledge excludes the dialectic of question and answer?[168]

Gadamer confronts popular opinion (for example, a characteristically arrogant opinion) as that which one must labour beyond. One must be prepared to put aside opinion and venture into uncertainty (Gadamer's "indeterminate"). A "real" question breaks through the thin laminate of popular opinion and presents itself to us, challenging our "openness" and willingness to encounter

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[164]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

[165]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 363f.

[166]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365.

[167]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 366.

[168]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365.

the unknown. There is a duality of not having enough effort (not enough ability) to break through to the question ourselves and yet a need to have the desire to do so. We cannot teach ourselves to question and yet we cannot "not" try to break through to the unknown (the question which lifts us up beyond ourselves). As an example, he considers sudden ideas and their irreverence to popular opinion as they often challenge us. In character, the question might best be considered a "passion." "A question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion."[169] Gadamer rejects the notion of "questioning" as an art in the traditional sense. He does not believe it to be an art or craft that can be taught or which could be mastered in the discovery of truth. And yet the question reflects itself in our volition toward a dialectical openness - a genuine dialogue.[170]

Gadamer writes:

> As the art of asking questions, dialectic proves its value because only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further - i.e., the art of thinking.[171]

It is enough at this point to say that what unfolds during dialogue or conversation is more than mere opinion. "What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know."[172]

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[169]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 366.

[170]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 367.

[171]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 367.

[172]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 368.

Question and Answer,

Gadamer's experiential hermeneutic presupposes the primacy of dialogue and the structure of question and answer. In that structure, where a text is interpreted, it presents the interpreter with a question that might not be the original question asked by the author but is nevertheless a real question to those who are open. "To understand a text means to understand this question."[173] The meaning of a sentence is relative to the question asked which implies more meaning than what is said in the sentence. That is implied because through all the questions there is the intent to go "beyond" what is said - to question further and see what is being asked by the statement. Questioning "beyond" seeks the horizon of the question, the horizon which includes various possible answers. Gadamer describes the hermeneutical horizon as the horizon of the question in which "the sense of the text is determined." The determination may have manifold implication or answers. Gadamer recognizes that the text does not speak like a 'Thou' (another person) and as such the text is made to speak by the interpreter. This forced speech is not arbitrary, as if it was initiated by the reader, but is in response to the "anticipated" answer in the text.

In attempting to reconstruct a text Gadamer holds a skeptical view of any naive historical objectivity. One cannot merely peer into the historical past and reconstruct the intent and tradition of the author; summarizing meaning as it is constructed. On the contrary, the questions that confront us (with a determinate sense, but also in a multifarious sense) have little to do with the author's mental state and everything to do with the text itself.[174] We are perpetually

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[173]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 370.

[174]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 374.

attempting to reinterpret the question to which the text is possibly answering and all that in response to a "real" question that we have. "To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question."[175] Understanding is more than merely recreating another's meaning. It is in the understanding of questionableness that one already is questioning. There can be no potential questioning or attitude toward questioning. Gadamer seems to advocate that one must play the game in its entirety by getting dirty and being challenged or simply not play at all. "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."[176]

In short, Gadamer's question and answer dialectic can be understood as a temporally contingent dialogue of interpretation, that is, meaning evolves in relation to the rules of emerging historical contexts. Gadamer's proposal is not oriented toward the original intention but toward a text's emerging message - how it speaks to "real" questions. The "real" is the hermeneutic experience of possession by means of which we are opened up for the new, the different, the true. Through asking a question, the text is brought to life, so to say. Every question brings about a modification or move of the horizon of the writing. All that is questioned is also limited and directed by the questions of the interpreter and, of course, the evolving text itself. Gadamer's question/answer dynamic, distinguished from intentionality, is always a claim within a context. Through the horizon of the question we come to understand why someone might make a given

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[175]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 375.

[176]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 379.

claim at a given point in time. To be clear, the question is the mode or locus of encountering something different and not the claim which answers the question.

Gadamer and Tillich,

What we have seen, throughout this thesis, is the approach to experience and its inseparable mode of understanding, which is evident in both Tillich and Gadamer. These approaches to understanding and interpretation involve existential participation that is not formal in the sense of being abstracted methodologies but involve "revelatory experience" or "play" that have rules or structures that we are "grasped" by. The playing out of Tillich's correlation, of the objective and subjective self, is in many ways Gadamer's "play." Tillich's revelatory experience where there is an ontological shock that is "a state in which the mind is thrown out of its normal balance, shaken in its structure,"[177] is, in like sense, Gadamer's consideration that all true experiences are negative - when one is willing to give him or herself over to the play of the text to be moved in unpredictable ways. Tillich does not seem to indicate the "grasp" of revelatory experiences as a dramatic religious experience but as something which we did not produce - it transcends our will like the rules of Gadamer's "play." Also, Tillich's "ultimate concern" or ultimate seriousness "grasps"[178] us in a way familiar to Gadamer's idea of poetry that "holds up near" and in which time seems to stop.

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[177]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 113.

[178]Tillich considers a person who takes something with ultimate seriousness: "This means that, as his life developed, this seriousness was not produced by active, reflective, voluntary processes, but came to him, perhaps very clearly, and never left him." MacKenzie Brown, ed. *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*. First Dialogue. (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978), online edition available at http://www.religions-online.org/cgi-bin/relsearchd.dll/showbook?item_id=538.

It is interesting to note that Tillich touches on many points of Gadamer's historically effective consciousness, implicitly. For instance, Tillich clearly believes that any formulation of Christian truth will be culturally conditioned and relative to a particular historical period in which it occurs.[179] Like Gadamer, Tillich does not presume that any period in history, for example one with more advanced conceptual tools, is better equipped to express truth over those of his or her predecessors. Tillich held that all theological formulations are necessarily conditioned by the cultural contexts from which they develop and in which they lack finality.[180] Again, Tillich's criterion for the adequacy of expressing religious truth is its character of "self-break," or of being "alive."[181] Consequently, both Gadamer and Tillich find themselves searching for truth through perpetual and creative reinterpretation, and without presuming fewer prejudices will inhibit their search because there are an infinite number of prejudices that may occur. Consequently, their criteria of expressions of truth must be based upon perpetual struggles to understand and the risks of engaging the mysterious, the other and the negative.

It might appear that the most obvious difference between Tillich's understanding of experience and Gadamer's is that Tillich's is fundamentally an experience of transcendence but

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[179]Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 62f.

[180]See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 59ff and 151

[181]Coburn recognizes two criteria in Tillich's theology for the truth of a revelatory experience. First, ". . . the account [must] be alive, where this means that the account possesses the power to catalyze revelatory experience (and hence the faith-state or the state of being ultimately concerned) in those to whom it is addressed." And second, ". . . the truth of such an account is that its 'acceptance' involves appreciation of the fact that it lacks literal truth, i.e., is a 'myth' or a 'symbolic' account." See Robert C. Coburn, "God, Revelation, and Religious Truth: Some Themes and Problems in the Theology of Paul Tillich." *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (January 1996): 8.

this is not the case. Tillich has a transcendental experience of sorts in mind but his fundamental way of approaching "experience" is symbolic as a finite representation for the infinite. That is, nothing of the transcendent real may be spoken of literally and yet revelatory experiences have a sense of realness to them (for example, "alive," "self-breaking"). Tillich raises questions that he believes are only appropriately raised in relation to problems that are inherent in the "human situation" and are not merely theological puzzles. His resolutions are consequently practical resolutions. Thus, it is not entirely clear just how separate the transcendent and immanent characteristics of these two thinkers make their approaches at odds. Moreover, it is clear that both are highly concerned with asking "real" questions (for example, unlike the exaggerated scholastic questions that were concerned with how many angels can dance on the head of a pin).

Perhaps the most telling difference between these two thinkers and their different hermeneutical ways of "understanding" come down to the difference of sign and symbol, or lack thereof. Gadamer presents an interesting opposition to Tillich when he attempts to discredit the theory of signs as theoretically referential. Both thinkers stress the objectivity as well as the indirectness of the symbol while maintaining their createdness. For Tillich, the symbol is a revealer of objective existence, which discloses "dimensions of our own soul corresponding to dimensions of reality."[182] For Gadamer, the work of art is analogous to a symbolic gesture.[183] However, Gadamer does not agree that signs and symbols must be distinguished. He does not see

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[182]Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 44.

[183]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Play of Art," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Nicolas Walker, trans. and Robert Bernasconi, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 126.

how people can clearly distinguish between the sign and that of which it is a sign. Tillich's notion of signs as purely referential and even arbitrary raises the question, "Do we have the ability to think in a wordless language, to think that a word needed to be contrived in order to designate the thing?"[184] Do we know the essence of a thing independently of its being marked by a word? For Gadamer, thinking and language are "bound together" intimately. He writes:

> Language and thinking about objects are so bound together that it is an abstraction to conceive of the system of truths as a pre-given system of possibilities of being, with which the signs at the disposal of the signifying subject are associated. A word is not a sign for which one reaches, nor is it a sign that one makes or gives to another, it is not an existent thing which one takes up and to which one accords the ideality of meaning in order to make something else visible through it. This is a mistake on both counts. Rather, the ideality of the meaning lies in the word itself. It is meaningful already.[185]

For Gadamer, religious language should not be examined for its referential qualities but for the living context or expression given in the language - the language in which we live. Gadamer sees language and thinking as an involvement with living, rather than just represented things. In a similar manner, Tillich moves beyond signs as he embraces the living involvement with symbols.

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[184]Nietmann William, *The Unmaking of God* (New York: University Press of America, 1994), 170.

[185]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method.* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986, English trans. 1975), 4.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have elucidated Paul Tillich's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's respective notions of what it means to overcome estrangement and alienation, how Tillich and Gadamer work with issues of subjective and objective thinking, and finally, what it means for the question to be a priority and how that relates to our ontology.

The intent of this examination has been to draw out some of the implications of what it means to have experience, that is, it was the implicit endeavour of this work to find the ontological determinations of what it means to interact with discourse and ultimately to relate that material to questions of human experience and discourse concerning the divine. Primary among my many concerns has been to address "event ontology" and the qualification of nonliteral language. These concerns manifest themselves most obviously in the question, How might one participate in an experience of the infinite?

Traditionally, the hermeneutic act has been understood as that which is, and which offers insights that may contribute to the understanding and application of various concepts of translation, architectures of biblical exegesis and virtually all methods of biblical inquiry. However, the hermeneutical experience, arguably best exposed in Gadamer's hermeneutic event and complemented by Tillich's existential participation in the symbol, offers a turn that not only contributes to a fuller understanding of the traditional hermeneutic act itself but of faith experiences as they relate comprehensively to our understanding of ourselves in the world and of the divine and human relationship. A conceptualization of the hermeneutical event as an unfolding expression of our primary Being-in-the-world is of fundamental importance to a fuller

conceptualization of the boundaries and feasibility of the theological enterprise at large and the purified visage of the living dynamic of experienced faith in particular.

In Gadamer's hermeneutic one finds a profound ontological move away from prescriptive and mechanical concerns (typified by the sciences) and the emphasis on subjectivity (typified by Descartes) as a concerted effort to develop an understanding of the best examples of our self-encounters and expressions, for example, the poetic expression and the dialectic knowledge of the question. In Tillich's hermeneutic one finds an effort to develop the existential participation with the symbol and the religious symbol specifically. Tillich's concerns are very much like those of Gadamer, that is, to ask "real" questions about our interaction with language, to peer into the culture around us as the productive grounds of our prejudice and interpretive horizons, and to work out the implications of risk in our openness to "the other." Ultimately, both Tillich and Gadamer relate their ideas to notions of either "possession" or of being "grasped" by the world (as a distinct recognition of our finitude) in which we are immersed. After recognizing and emphasizing our finitude both Tillich and Gadamer move beyond it in their desire to be open to the priority of the question as a participation in infinite possibilities - a fusion of horizons for one, a participation in the symbol for another.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic is an awakening of existence to itself, a Heideggerian awakening of Da-sein to which Being is always already a concern but for whom it has been lost for a life lived inauthentically in "the they." This awakening challenges us with infinite openness as a philosophy of finitude in which we struggle with understanding that is always painted upon the canvas that all things escape us and time is not ours to own.

Understanding is never a subjective relation to an object but to the history of its effects. Each of us is an "effective-historical consciousness" who views the past and its remnants from a particular horizon (with its particular pre-understandings). Understanding is the interplay between the present and past as a "fusion" where we can never decide which interpretation is correct since the interpretation is historically conditioned and open to later re-interpretation. An authentic interpretation will make the best use of our reflection on pre-understandings (prejudice).

For Gadamer, all expressions (presumably including those about the divine), are answers to questions, asked or unasked, that have their reference point in human existence. From Tillich one finds a more methodological approach, in contrast to Gadamer, of correlation which explains the contents of Christian faith through existential question asking (inseparable from theological answers). The philosophical questions raised by his analysis of human existence are indivisible from the theological answers, where this fundamental intertwining and separation (not a division *per se* due to the interdependent nature of both) underlies the structure of his approach to overcoming estrangement.

Normative discourse succeeds upon unaided understanding of expressions (for Gadamer the more we can get on with using language the better) where heavy weighed calculations and thorough investigations of all speech acts and human articulation would prove impossibly difficult. However, the invisible hands of modernity and post-modernity, have challenged normative unaided understanding and made it very problematic. In response to skepticism concerning various barriers to understanding and even the curiosity over the possibility of understanding understanding itself, Tillich and Gadamer have offered an analysis of human experience as the

basis for the hermeneutic consciousness. One might argue that their efforts flow from the hermeneutical task necessitated by existence itself, namely, that there is always a sense of "otherness" in trying to understand or interpret an event or text and in response an analysis that takes seriously our "Being" of experiential interpretation is needed. The undeniable nature of "Being" that is open to life is one that it is perpetually questioned by "the other."

Perhaps the most profound impact of Gadamerian and Tillichian hermeneutics is that they remind us of our struggle with understanding that always escapes us, that, I believe, becomes an expression of our faith as we struggle to find and participate in truth. Faith experiences are not appendages to or reflexive actions of interpretation, understanding ourselves, understanding the world or the divine, so much as our fundamental way-of-Being unfolding as an expression of faith that seeks understanding. Faith experience must be fundamentally open to the question and the challenge of infinite openness without holding to false presuppositions. Faith experience is one that is perpetually reinterpreting and reintegrating shifts of understanding, and approaching the surrounding culture with open eyes to the new, the mysterious and the enigmatic.

Like Tillich's symbol which must be born of a given culture's "collective unconscious" rather than intentionally created or destroyed by individuals, Gadamer considers the experience of art where our judgements about art (including the intentions of the artist) is not as pivotal as the artwork itself. Tillich's "religious symbol" and Gadamer's experience of the work of art tends to hold power over the participants or players. An authentic experience of them involves not a historical reconstruction of the circumstances of the original culture in which the symbols were born or the intent of the painter or poet, but a living relationship (an experience) to them (symbol

and artwork) which shows that they have something to "say" to our present situation. Through their hermeneutics both Tillich and Gadamer challenge us to a relationship with truth and meaning that cannot be narrowly defined or examined by method, or expressed without simultaneously asking more questions.

In conclusion, philosophical hermeneutics and Tillich's symbol are both operations of praxis where application is undivided from understanding, and interpretation inseparable from application. These existential philosophies are practical philosophies in which they follow the way of experience rather than merely speculative abstractions. Tillich's weaving together of theo-praxis and the effort to make available the richness of nonliteral language provide profound avenues for theological hermeneutics as a study of interpretation and understanding, which, Gadamer makes clear, must be aware of its finitude, the nature of truth outside method, and the priority of openness and the question.

The sense of alienation and disorientation of modern society, due largely to the substitution of natural or instinctive dialogue with the world for narrow scientific truth claims, for Gadamer, and the ontological estrangement from the "ground of being," for Tillich, presents us with two intelligible accounts of existential schism that deserve thorough consideration. The value of dialogue, poetry, historical study and participation in the symbolic, is not that we are told of factual happenings or told of that which is decidedly right or wrong, but that we are drawn into a relation with the past, ourselves, and the infinite, in a way that further shows us who we are and offers us more than what we already know.

Through a participation with the infinite the Word of God becomes an event of our

intimate participation. Like language, that is not the instrument we yield but the medium through which we participate with something greater than ourselves, the participation in the "religious symbol" is something that we risk ourselves for and become vulnerable toward. In the employment of language as an instrument we become lost, for example, through a focus on accentuation, punctuation and all things grammatically exacting and taking of our attention. The more one is aware of the words, the analytic endeavour, the less one can recognize the mediation of understanding through them. In Tillich the "religious symbol" mediates between the finite and the infinite and offers us a participation in an experience of "ultimacy.' In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, language becomes the medium as we participate in our present historically situated reality and fuse horizons with the past in a never ending dialectical activity of question asking and prejudice considering. Both hermeneutical approaches offer ways of overcoming "objective" epistemological boundaries, alienation from "subjective" aesthetic truth claims and existential estrangement - as we participate in the infinite.

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