BEING AND GAIA

by

Ryan T. O’Leary

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religious Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May, 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Emeritus David E. Klemm
This dissertation is grounded in a detailed analysis of Paul Tillich’s ontology and theology, which allows me to develop a conceptual analysis grounded in a particular ontological theory. Specifically, that theory is the existential ontology developed by Martin Heidegger and theologically codified by Paul Tillich. Based in that analysis, the dissertation develops a philosophical concept of Nature, arguing that the modern understanding of Nature is a product of existential estrangement, the mechanistic understanding of nature of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, and the technological drive to master nature. The modern concept of Nature is thus deeply ambiguous: Nature is that from which we are apart but simultaneously that of which we are a part. The dissertation then employs Tillich’s method of correlation to correlate this concept of Nature with the recently revitalized symbolic name, Gaia, understood through the lens of James Lovelock’s Gaia theory. This allows for a religious ethic of environmental conservation -- fully grounded in a scientific, ecological understanding of the life process of the Earth as a whole as well as a systematic and developed philosophical ontology and theology -- guided by the imaginative resource of an image of a living Earth, Gaia.

Abstract Approved: ________________________________________________________________

Thesis Supervisor

____________________________________________________________

Title and Department

____________________________________________________________

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

Ryan T. O’Leary

has been approved by the examining committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religious Studies at the May 2012 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

David E. Klemm, Thesis Supervisor

Ralph Keen

Raymond A. Mentzer

Jay Holstein

David G. Stern
To my parents, Timothy and Charlene,
and to my wife, Doreen…
without you, nothing
Come now, O Lord my God. Teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. Lord, if you are not here, where shall I seek you, since you are absent? But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you, since you are present?

St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*
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INTRODUCTION:
THE RELIGIOUS CHALLENGE
AND THE METHOD OF INQUIRY

God is not nearer to one “part” of being or to a special function of being than he is to another. As Spirit he is as near to the creative darkness of the unconscious as he is to the critical light of cognitive reason. Spirit is the power through which meaning lives, and it is the meaning which gives direction to power. God as Spirit is the ultimate unity of both power and meaning. In contrast to Nietzsche, who identified the two assertions that God is Spirit and that God is dead, we must say that God is the living God because he is Spirit.

—Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume One

Nietzsche and the Modern Challenge to Religion

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, under the impact of the success of the scientific revolution, the expanding frontiers of exploration and knowledge of diverse worldviews, and the increasing failure of traditional authority to come to terms with new discoveries, Western thought faced a crucial challenge. In the twenty-first century, one of the most pressing consequences of that challenge is the ecological crisis resulting from our scientific and industrial drive to finally and completely master nature. And these challenges are deeply connected, for with the loss of meaning and the threat of nihilism our drive to become masters of a dead world becomes not only tragic but ultimately suicidal.

The most vocal and disturbing prophet of the nihilism of our age was Friedrich Nietzsche. I will not insult the reader’s intelligence by quoting Nietzsche’s story of the madman in the marketplace—doing so has become common to the point of banality. Yet in the famous and commonly misunderstood announcement, “God is dead . . . And we have killed him,” Nietzsche gives voice to the abyss that opens under our feet when the guarantor of value disappears from his heaven with nothing ready to replace him: “Is not
the deed too great for us?” the madman asks. “Must we ourselves not become gods
simply to appear worthy of it?” Ultimately for Nietzsche the challenge is a question of
the value and meaning of life, of existence:

Behind the highest value judgments that have hitherto guided the history of
thought, there are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution—of
individuals or classes or even whole races. All those bold insanities of
metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the value of existence, may
always be considered first of all as the symptoms of certain bodies. . . . I am still
waiting for a philosophical physician in the exceptional sense of that word—one
who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race, or
humanity—to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the
proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all “truth”
but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.

For Nietzsche, what is essential to human being is identical to what is essential to all
being—life, understood in terms of growth, which in turn he understood as an expression
of “the will power,” another commonly misunderstood phrase.

According to Nietzsche, what sets human beings apart from the rest of life—their
distinguishing feature—is their apparently bizarre need to find a reason to value life. He
puts the point with characteristic bombast and poetry:

What is the meaning of the ever new appearance of these founders of moralities
and religions, these instigators of fights over moral valuations, these teachers of
remorse and religious wars? . . . It is obvious that even these tragedians, too,
promote the interests of the species, even if they should believe that they promote
the interest of God or work as God’s emissaries. They, too, promote the life of
the species, by promoting the faith in life. “Life is worth living,” every one of
them shouts; “there is something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it;
beware!” . . . Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfill one
more condition of existence than any other animal: man has to believe, to know,
from time to time why he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust
in life—without faith in reason in life.

For Nietzsche, however, life has no “something” behind it to give it value—life simply is
growth and expansion, and it announces its own value in its growth and self-overcoming.
And it is precisely the success of the scientific revolution—ultimately an expression of the faith in reason, the faith in truth—that finally undermines faith in the God of Christianity:

*What, in all strictness, has really conquered the Christian God? . . . Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness taken more and more strictly, the confessional subtlety of the Christian conscience translated and sublimated into the scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. To view nature as if it were a proof of the goodness and providence of a God; to interpret history to the glory of a divine reason, as the perpetual witness to a moral world order and moral intentions; to interpret one’s own experiences, as pious men long interpreted them, as if everything were preordained, everything a sign, everything sent for the salvation of the soul—that now belongs to the past, that has the conscience against it . . . All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming . . . In this way Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as a morality must now perish, too: we stand on the threshold of this event. After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its most striking inference, its inference against itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question “what is the meaning of all will to truth?”*4

For Nietzsche, the answer to this question—“What is the meaning of all will to truth?”—must be couched in terms of the value of believing in the validity of one’s own perspective as necessary for life:

To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one . . . In particular, let us further consider the formation of concepts. Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases—which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the "leaf": the original model according to which all the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted—but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness of the original model. . . . What then is truth? A
movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions—they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.5

It is thus that the drive to truth above all else that turns against itself and displaces the guarantor of value, God in His heaven—this is the sense in which we have killed God, and Nietzsche warns that we ourselves are not god-like enough to make ourselves worthy of the act.

Hence our age has made itself an age of nihilism, an age in which meaning can be bought at the mall, if one has enough credit… and absent that human life has no value at all apart from its capacity to produce commercial products for those with the means to enjoy them. Life has value in and of itself—life as life announces its own power in growth and striving—but for the human animal that requires a “because” behind life to sense that value, it is necessary to interpret life as meaningful as “proof of the goodness and providence of a God.” When that interpretation falls away under the weight of its own accretions, Nietzsche warned, human beings are left with no sense of value at all.

Tillich’s Method and System as a Response to the Modern Challenge

For our purposes the degree to which Nietzsche’s philosophy is accurate, systematic, or even internally coherent is irrelevant. What is crucial is that his analysis of the nihilistic spirit of the time, couched in his critique of Western Christianity, expressed a challenge posed by the very spirit of the age of modernity, a challenge Christian thought would have to face. Among the most influential twentieth-century thinkers to
take up this challenge was Paul Tillich, a German-born Lutheran minister and theologian.

As Tillich himself puts it,

> The decisive event which underlies the search for meaning and the despair of it in the 20th century is the loss of God in the 19th century. Feuerbach explained God away in terms of the infinite desire of the human heart; Marx explained him away in terms of an ideological attempt to rise above the given reality; Nietzsche as a weakening of the will to live. The result is the pronouncement ―God is dead,‖ and with him the whole system of values and meanings in which one lived. This is felt both as a loss and as a liberation. It drives one either to nihilism or to the courage which takes nonbeing into itself.6

Of course Tillich pursued the second option, the search for the recovery of meaning and value in the courage which takes the threat of nonbeing—experienced in anxiety—into its own self-affirmation. Tillich sought to do this theologically. In this way his entire theological project is apologetic. He understood that his theology had to answer the modern challenge to religion, as expressed by Nietzsche—he had to answer the questions implied not only in “the general human situation,” but also in “the special historical situation.”7

In other words, Tillich could not simply appeal to the metaphysical assumptions that Nietzsche and his ilk had so undermined. The characteristic move of metaphysics, as Nietzsche saw it, was the idea that the human mind was able to abstract to essences, generally read in terms of Platonic forms. By abstracting from particular, empirical perceptions, the human mind can come to an apprehension of the essences which transcend and unite all particulars. These essences are understood to be eternal and unchanging—ahistorical—and as comprising the formative structure of reality. Further, since these essences, or forms, came to be seen as somehow partaking of the divine reason, the divine ordering principle of all reality, the human mind was able to participate in the divine mind through this process of abstraction.
In contrast, Nietzsche held that all thinking is perspectival—that is, all thought is an interpretation of reality for the purpose of the preservation and growth of life, an interpretation of perception, and is fundamentally and unavoidably situated. We find remnants of this insight throughout Nietzsche's writings, but it is introduced in "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," more thoroughly treated in Human, All-Too-Human, developed in The Gay Science, and most forcefully—if perhaps least systematically—articulated in its implications in Beyond Good and Evil. As situated, all thought is colored and informed by social, historical, physiological, and unconscious psychological factors. There is no sort of "view from nowhere" that the philosopher can adopt. This means that the classic idea of truth-as-representation is also dissolved: truth that depends upon unmediated access to "reality" on the part of a transcendental ego—an essential "I" whose nature is simply thought, and which can rise in abstractions to a reality above and behind mere appearance—is systematically inaccessible.

Moreover, Nietzsche points out that "Truth" has been equated with the divine; this is part and parcel with metaphysical thinking, for the metaphysical apprehension of essences is seen as the human participation in the divine mind. Yet in addition to his critique in the form of perspectivalism, in On the Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche digs into the subconscious, historical, and sociological roots of the Western metaphysical-theological tradition—that is, the situatedness of the interpretation. We will recall that this tradition, rooted in Platonic thought, posits a highest being as the condition and aim of all thought, and makes it the source and guarantor of "the good." Nietzsche suggests, however, that the idea of "good" was originally based in a noble self-affirmation, in the exercise and discharge of strength … in short, in the affirmation of life. Western
theology in the metaphysical mode, according to Nietzsche, reinterprets the "good" in terms of weakness, making weakness a choice and thus morally commendable. This inversion of value is done for the sake of the protective instinct of a degenerating life that makes its valuations universal. As such, this inversion turns the affirmation of life on its head, makes the denial of life fundamental, posits a “beyond” which is the source of all good ... and does so for the sake of the preservation of life. Here we find an internal contradiction that the tradition cannot maintain once it is brought into the light: life denies itself in the ascetic ideal for the preservation of a degenerating life. As such, Nietzsche suggests, when faith in the God of the life-denying ascetic ideal is itself rejected, the Christian drive for truth turns back upon itself; it finds its roots, makes the question of truth a problem, and thus is threatened by nihilism.

For his part, Tillich takes the suggestion that all thought is interpretation very seriously. For this very reason Tillich incorporates into his theological project a Heideggerian ontology—this ontology derives from Nietzsche's critique, and parallels metaphysics in seeking grounding concepts. Unlike metaphysics, however, this existential ontology seeks grounding concepts not in ahistorical essences but through an analysis of the human being which asks the question of the meaning of its own being and of being-itself, and as such necessarily recognizes its own ontological and existential concepts as situated and historical.

Thus, Tillich seeks to locate the "truth" of traditional religious symbols by correlating them with philosophical concepts—this method he calls the method of correlation. On this account, symbols are held to have six characteristics: (1) symbols point to something beyond themselves; (2) symbols participate in that to which they point;
(3) symbols open to us heretofore unrecognized depths of reality; (4) they also open corresponding depths to our own souls; (5) symbols cannot be consciously invented, but spring from the individual or collective subconscious; and (6), like living things, symbols live and die. Here, with number six, we see a central incorporation of the ontological internalization of Nietzsche's critique—religious symbols are not the concrete expressions of ahistorical essences, but changing expressions of existential concerns.

Correlated to these symbols are philosophical concepts. These (existential) philosophical concepts are the expressions of perennial human questions: What is the meaning of life? Where do we come from, and where are we going? What is the right thing to do? Existential concepts express the questions that religious symbols answer, and existential concepts articulate the meaning of the symbols insofar as they answer existential questions. Hence we can see that the method of correlation can be construed as a hermeneutical method. Not only are we interpreting philosophical concepts in the light of religious symbols, and interpreting religious symbols in the light of philosophical concepts, but in so doing we are interpreting the products of the deepest questions and expressions of our own individual and collective subconscious.

Moreover, there is an historical level of interpretation in this method, for it can be used to interpret even theological positions which do not share its assumptions, even the metaphysical theology it seeks to overcome. That is to say, by understanding that philosophical concepts express the questions implied by our deepest concerns, and that religious symbols manifest our answers, we can see that metaphysical theology is a particular expression of these same deep existential concerns arising out of a particular place and time, and incorporating particular assumptions. As such, though we need to
recognize metaphysical theology as fundamentally contingent—though we need to recognize that Nietzsche's critique is telling, and that we cannot, with real confidence, ascend to direct apprehension of eternal essences—we can see even the faith that one can so ascend as a particular response to a particularly powerful existential concern.

With this method, Tillich seeks to achieve a systematic theology which functions as the mediation of religious symbols and philosophical concepts, which is aware of its own historicality, which fundamentally responds to existential concerns, and which does so in a way that is relevant in the wake of the death of God. To Tillich’s way of thinking, all modern Western philosophy, even anti-Christian philosophies like that of Nietzsche, has its existential basis in Christianity. “Atheism and anti-Christianity,” he writes, “are anti-Christian in Christian terms. The scars of the Christian tradition cannot be erased.” Thus the philosophical challenge to Christian theology is itself rooted in Christianity, just as Nietzsche himself maintained. The theological response will need to derive from the contents of that critique to respond to its special historical situation. Tillich interprets his own situation to mean that theology must adopt the concerns and focus of existentialism, for it is in existentialism, Tillich recognizes, that the challenge is most forcefully experienced.

Above we noted that in the method of correlation philosophical concepts express fundamental human questions—even while they purport to provide answers—and that this is particularly true of existential concepts:

The distinction has been made between atheistic and theistic existentialism. Certainly there are existentialists who could be called “atheistic,” at least according to their intention; and there are others who can be called “theistic.” But in reality there is no atheistic or theistic existentialism. Existentialism gives an analysis of what it means to exist... It develops the question implied in existence, but it does not try to give the answer, either in atheistic or theistic
terms. Whenever existentialists give answers, they do so in terms of religious or quasi-religious traditions which are not derived from their existential analysis. . . . None of these men was able to develop answers out of his questions. . . . Existentialism is an analysis of the human predicament. And the answers to the questions implied in man’s predicament are religious, whether open or hidden.  

Again, there are two sides to the “human predicament”: the general human situation and the special historical situation. In one important way, existentialism as a philosophical movement concerns themes that speak to the general human condition: freedom, anxiety, meaning, and so on. On the other hand, as a philosophical trend it occupies a particular historical situation, and speaks specifically to special historical concerns, such as the human experience of becoming an impersonal object in a vast industrialized bureaucracy that is a characteristic feature of the modern age.

It is in the second sense that Tillich’s theology is apologetic, and as apologetic it functions as a response to the specifically modern challenge. Tillich seeks to reinterpret the metaphysical “answers” of earlier ages as existential questions—for example, he reinterprets the ontological proof for the existence of God as an expression of the question inherent in human finitude—but more importantly he seeks to interpret traditional Christian symbols as answers to existential concerns. Of course, the most pressing of those concerns for Christian thought, and arguably for Western thought in general, is the modern anxiety over the threat of meaninglessness.

Thus, Tillich writes, “Most important of all the Existentialists was Nietzsche, who in his description of European nihilism presented the picture of a world in which human existence has fallen into utter meaninglessness.” The threat of meaninglessness is ultimately expressed in the announcement of the death of God, and thus Tillich must seek an understanding of God that survives Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity:
The God of theological theism [also called classical theism] is a being beside others and as such a part of the whole of reality. He certainly is considered its most important part, but as a part and therefore as subjected to the structure of the whole. He is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories which constitute reality. But every statement subjects him to them. . . . As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. And this is decisive for the necessity of transcending theological theism. For God as subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. . . . He becomes the model of everything against which existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control. This is the deepest root of atheism. It is an atheism which is justified as the reaction against theological theism and its disturbing implications. It is also the deepest root of Existentialist despair and the widespread anxiety of meaninglessness in our period.12

Certainly, one of the most characteristic modern existential concerns is that industrialized, capitalist society makes the free, individual subject into a mere object in the mechanism of production and profit. Where there is no God we are utterly trapped in the iron cage of industrialized capitalism. Hence, the critique of modern industrial society converges with the modern challenge to religion at the deepest existential level, and it is this challenge that the existential theology of Paul Tillich sets out to meet.

The Project at Hand

In the opening paragraph, we noted that the modern critique of religion and the twenty-first century environmental crisis converge in nihilism. This claim has now been demonstrated, for the modern, industrialized, scientific, technological, capitalist understanding of nature has found itself in a world without God, and has no understanding of any value apart from the economic. Even human beings have been made into objects, and this holds true not only of the exploited producers of our products. Even as consumers our value—the meaning of who we are—is primarily bought in
stores. It is little wonder, then, that we as a society have a difficult time recognizing the inherent value of non-human nature.

This project continues Tillich’s work into the twenty-first century by responding to the special historical situation as an existential concern. Where Tillich sought to meet the challenge of meaninglessness, this project seeks to meet the theological challenge of articulating the value of nature. It is entirely grounded in Tillich’s ontological and theological system, and derives its philosophical direction from there. Tillich needed to articulate an understanding of God beyond the God of classical theism, the God that Nietzsche said was dead. This project begins with Tillich’s theological answer to the challenge of modernity and extends it to articulate an understanding of the value of nature beyond our estrangement from the natural world of which we are a part. It is my belief that to begin to solve the ecological crisis of our time, religious people must have religious grounds for valuing nature as more than a standing reserve of raw material. Just as Tillich sought to provide a Christian response to the challenge of modernity, I seek to provide a response to the dominant mechanistic view of nature in philosophical, theological, and symbolic terms.

In the briefest of terms, the dissertation is grounded in a detailed analysis of Paul Tillich’s ontology and theology, which allows me to develop a conceptual analysis grounded in a particular ontological theory. Specifically, that theory is the existential ontology developed by Martin Heidegger and theologically codified by Paul Tillich. Based in that analysis, the dissertation develops a philosophical concept of Nature, arguing that the modern understanding of Nature is a product of existential estrangement, the mechanistic understanding of nature of the seventeenth-century
scientific revolution, and the technological drive to master nature. The modern concept of Nature is thus deeply ambiguous: Nature is that from which we are apart but simultaneously that of which we are a part. The dissertation then employs Tillich’s method of correlation to correlate this concept of Nature with the recently revitalized symbolic name, Gaia, understood through the lens of James Lovelock’s Gaia theory. This allows for a religious ethic of environmental conservation—fully grounded in a scientific, ecological understanding of the life process of the Earth as a whole as well as a systematic and developed philosophical ontology and theology—guided by the imaginative resource of an image of a living Earth, Gaia.

Structurally, the project is divided into three parts, each consisting of three chapters.

Part One, entitled “The Grounding Ontology and the Guiding Symbol,” begins in Chapter I by offering a detailed analysis of Tillich’s ontological theology. This analysis will ground the project in a fully developed ontological system—the ontological philosophy of Paul Tillich, which is in turn indebted to Martin Heidegger’s existential analytic. It will consider the foundational statement “God is being-itself,” articulate critical ontological terms such as “being,” “existence,” “power of being,” and “nonbeing.” It will detail Tillich’s understanding of the structure of being as a dynamical dialectic of the power of being and nonbeing, and relate that to the idea that God is a “living God.” In Chapter II we will consider the idea of the divine life in more depth. Here we will discuss the dialectical relation of the infinite and the finite in Tillich’s system, detail what Tillich means by life as an ontological reality, and show how the essential structure of finite life is analogous to the process of outgoing and return
characteristic of the divine life. We will then show that, due to the dialectical constitution of the divine life, Tillich’s God can be understood to participate in the processes of finite being, and that those processes participate in the divine life. This leads to Chapter III, in which we demonstrate that Tillich’s theology is deeply panentheistic and discuss some of its more relevant implications. We will again define essential terms, and we will consider Tillich’s panentheism as it bears on the question of finite freedom and the passibility of the divine.

Part Two, entitled “The Concept of Nature,” sets out to develop an ontological and existential concept of Nature grounded in Tillich’s system. In Chapter IV, we look at Tillich’s understanding of nature—this involves some interpretation, as Tillich was not a theologian of nature, as such. We consider the term gestalten in the work of both Tillich and the deep ecologist Arne Næss, and show that Tillich’s view of nature can be understood as deeply ecological. We then consider the panentheistic character of Tillich’s theology in regards to the question of nature, and suggest that this complexifies Tillich’s doctrine of the dual participation of the divine in the human and the human in the divine by adding a third term: nature. In Chapter V, we fully develop Nature as a philosophical, ontological concept. We briefly trace the history of the term, and in particular we trace the mechanistic materialism characteristic of the modern view of the natural world to the seventeenth century scientific revolution. We then turn to Heidegger’s discussion of technology for his analysis of the inherently nihilistic effects of the modern understanding of nature, which sets upon nature with the goal of ordering it into standing reserve for industrial, capitalist projects. Finally, we show that the modern understanding of nature is deeply a product of existential estrangement, and on that basis
develop an ontological concept of Nature as that which we recognize ourselves to be apart from and simultaneously feel ourselves to be a part of, and to which we long to return on the other side of estrangement. In Chapter VI we consider Nature as a religious idea. We begin by discussing the limits of religious naturalism, look at the religious import of estrangement in general, as Tillich understands it, and finish by looking at the role of organic consciousness in divine self-awareness in terms of Tillich’s appropriation of Hegel’s interpretation of the Trinitarian symbols.

In Part Three, entitled “The Symbolic Name, Gaia,” we draw upon the ontological and theological analysis, in which we grounded the project and on the basis of which we detailed the concept of Nature, to apply it to the ecological challenge directly. In Chapter VII we introduce the Gaia theory of James Lovelock, which reveals life on Earth to be a single, self-regulating and self-sustaining life process. We then show that this understanding is in keeping with Tillich’s ontological description of life, and apply the complexified understanding of dual participation discussed in Chapter IV to the idea of Gaia. In Chapter VIII we demonstrate the way that the symbolic name, Gaia, fully functions as a symbol in the Tillichian sense, show that on the basis of this symbolic understanding the statement, “Gaia, too, is created in the image of God,” has deep religious resonance and theological warrant. Finally, and most importantly, we employ Tillich’s method of correlation to correlate our ontological concept of Nature with the symbol of Gaia. In the last chapter, Chapter IX, we unpack the religious implications of bringing the symbol of Gaia into a fully developed and ontologically-grounded philosophical and theological system. We will consider the contemporary trend toward the greening of religion, show that the growth of Gaia as a life-process is a manifestation
of divine love, and apply the theological position we have developed to environmental ethics as such.

In the end, we will have developed an analysis of Tillich’s response to the religious challenge of modernity through a detailed analysis of his system. We will have grounded our construction of the central concept, Nature, in that ontological system. We will have correlated that concept with a symbol, Gaia, that functions as a religious symbol, and we will have shown that this religious symbol provides an imaginative religious resource by which we can grasp and articulate the inherent value of the natural world both philosophically and religiously. This articulation will be grounded in Christian thought but not limited to it. We hope that the symbol of Gaia can express the value of nature in such a way as to evoke the emotional response necessary to view the life and health of the planet as a whole as a subject of ethical consideration.
Notes


2. Ibid., “Preface,” § 2.

3. Ibid., § 1.


8. Ibid., 1:27.


10. Ibid., 1:204-08.


12. Ibid., 184-85.
PART ONE

THE GROUNDING ONTOLOGY

AND

THE GUIDING SYMBOL
CHAPTER I:
THE GROUND OF BEING AND THE DIVINE LIFE
IN TILLICH’S ONTOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

The ontological question, the question of being-itself, arises in something like a “metaphysical shock”—the shock of possible nonbeing. This shock often has been expressed in the question, “Why is there something; why not nothing?” But in this form the question is meaningless, for every possible answer would be subject to the same question in an infinite regression. Thought must start with being; it cannot go behind it, as the form of the question itself shows. If one asks why there is not nothing, one attributes being even to nothing. Thought is based on being, and it cannot leave this basis; but thought can imagine the negation of everything that is, and it can describe the nature and structure of being which give everything that is the power of resisting nonbeing.

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume One*

**Being and God**

In perhaps one of his most famous (and most difficult to unpack) statements, Paul Tillich claims that “God is being-itself.” This statement designates the boundary line where symbolic and non-symbolic language coincides, and hence where the method of correlation is made fruitful. As being-itself, God is the ground of the structure of being. God is not subject to the structure of being; the structure is grounded in God. Yet at the same time, God somehow is this structure, and it is impossible to speak about God other than in terms of the structure of being. “God must be approached cognitively through the structural elements of being-itself,” Tillich claims. “These elements make him a living God, a God who can be man’s concrete concern.” Here, then, we can begin our task of explicating the salient features of Tillich’s ontological theology such that we can begin to develop them. First, we see the identification of God with being-itself. Along with this we find reference to God as the ground of being—“in fact a convenient abbreviation of ‘ground and abyss of being’.” We see that God not only grounds the structure but that in
some important way God is the structure of being, and that to speak of God we must speak of the structure of being. We see that somehow the structural elements of being make God a living God—hence we can speak of the symbol “divine life” ontologically in terms of an active interplay of the structural elements of being. Finally, Tillich suggests that God can be our concrete concern, since God is a living God that we can approach cognitively through an understanding of the structure of being.

Tillich’s philosophy approaches being-itself through a consideration of the dynamic interplay of the elements that constitute the structure of being. As we will consider at some length in this chapter, being-itself is the absolute ground and abyss of that structure. As such, being-itself functions as a highest concept and is thus systematically indefinable. In simplest terms, the sort of definition being-itself resists involves designating a broad category of things or concepts to which the defined concept belongs, and designating that which differentiates the concept to be defined from all other members of that category. Yet there is no broader class concept to which being-itself can belong—thought cannot get behind being, and being-itself is the ground of the conditions of the possibility of there being anything at all. Thus Martin Heidegger writes, “‘Being’ is the most ‘universal’ concept . . . But the ‘universality’ of ‘being’ is not that of genus. ‘Being’ does not delimit the highest region of beings so far as they are conceptually articulated according to genus and species.”⁴ This is so especially since a genus is itself subject to definition, requiring differentiation from other genera.

Still, we can say that being-itself is the unifying principle of all the properties of the structure of being (noting the perennial problem that we need to recycle the concept of being to state that “being itself ‘is’ . . .). God is “that ultimacy in which the polarities of
being disappear in the ground of being, in being-itself.”⁵ Being-itself grounds all of the polarities which structure being. Being-itself is the primordial unity that makes separation into the structuring polarities of existence possible—hence being-itself cannot be subject to those same polarities. This will be a key element to our discussion of the divine life. Meanwhile, however, we must lay the groundwork for our analysis of Tillich’s philosophy, consider the place of this chapter in the broader argument, and distinguish some important terminological usages.

A basic premise of our ontological discussion can be formulated as such: As the ground of being, being-itself manifests itself in the structure of being as the power of being overcoming the threat of nonbeing. This locution might be confusing, and the confusion is exacerbated by Tillich’s tendency to what Adrian Thatcher calls “philosophical eclecticism,” by which “basic ontological concepts and ideas have become almost indistinguishably merged together, sometimes with the result that quite incompatible meanings are fused together beneath a single term.”⁶ Hence “being-itself,” “ground of being,” “power of being,” and simply “being” tend to be used almost synonymously. Our interpretation, on the other hand, brings the power of being into being-itself as the ability of actualizing potentia in the process of self-realization that all beings receive from their ground in being-itself. This interpretation will be guided by the idea of dialectic, for according to Tillich dialectics determine all life processes. Since God “has the character of all life, namely, to go beyond himself and to return to himself,” and since God is not only a living God but is being-itself, the ability for being-itself to manifest itself in being “must be described in dialectical statements.”⁷
That is, being-itself, in its self-manifestation and self-realization, has the dynamical and dialectical character of the power of being overcoming nonbeing infinitely and absolutely. Hence being-itself “manifests itself in finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself.”

This interpretation allows us to understand passages such as this one, from *The Courage to Be*:

> if being is interpreted in terms of life or process or becoming, nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being. The acknowledgement of this fact does not imply a decision about the priority of being over nonbeing, but it requires a consideration of nonbeing in the very foundation of ontology. Speaking of courage as a key to the interpretation of being-itself, one could say that this key, when it opens the door to being, finds, at the same time, being and the negation of being and their unity.

As we saw above, Tillich clearly wants to stress that God is a concrete concern of ours as a living God, and it is the polar structure of the elements of being in dialectical unity that make possible the self-manifestation of being-itself that is the divine life. Understanding nonbeing as an active ontological principle, as basic as the power of being, infinitely overcome in the unity of being-itself, is central to the idea of the divine life.

*The Place of the Analysis in the Argument*

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to develop a transcendental and ontological account of the concept of Nature, and to correlate that concept to the primordial symbolic name of Gaia. The basic thrust of the argument has been outlined in the Introduction; however, to make the argument work a vital task will be to ontologically determine the meaning of the central concept, Nature. Toward that end, we will seek to show the conditions for the possibility of our average, everyday concept of Nature as “the non-human wild” through an ontological analysis of the structure of
human existence characterized by separation and estrangement. Specifically, it will need to be shown that the concept of Nature is determined by an existential separation manifest in the cognitive separation of the world into a Man/Nature contrast. This first chapter seeks to develop the conceptual tools necessary for this argument by drawing upon the theological work of Paul Tillich, which is itself heavily influenced by the ontological work of Martin Heidegger. As such, this chapter will involve an analytical discussion of the ontological theology of Tillich, and that analysis will be directed toward an articulation of some basically important conceptual tools. Especially important is the development of the themes of existential separation, primordial unity, and the self-manifestation of God in being through the activity of the divine life. This first part of the dissertation is devoted to that task.

Thus, this chapter serves as preparatory analysis of the fundamental ontology to be adopted by this dissertation. The work of a fully developed and largely original transcendental or existential analytic is beyond the scope of this project—and in fact this work has already been accomplished by this author’s more competent predecessors. That is, it is not my intent to seek to replace the transcendental, ontological, and existential analyses of Kant, Heidegger, and Tillich. To make such an attempt would betray an unbearable hubris. Rather, this project intends to adopt their most important and relevant insights and to develop them in such a way as to guide the work of considering the constitution of the guiding concept, Nature, and to correlate it with the guiding symbol, Gaia. The interpretive analysis of the work of my betters found in these chapters will be toward that end. As a grounding analysis, furthermore, this chapter will be somewhat longer than many of the others. For the sake of completeness this is necessary—and
indeed, the completeness allowed by this length will remain philosophically incomplete. This is unfortunate but unavoidable; we seek only to ground the discussion in an interpretive analysis of the ontology and theology of Heidegger and Tillich in particular.

**Preliminary Definitions**

Our interpretation suggests the following usages, guided by the principle of dialectic, to be employed consistently. Each of these is provisional—that is, each of the following definitions will be developed, analyzed, and fleshed out in the remainder of this first chapter and in the second chapter.

**Being-itself, Ground of Being, and Divine Life**

“Being-itself” will hereafter refer to Tillich’s understanding of God as the absolute ground and abyss of all that is, as the primordial unity incorporating and transcending the polar structures that being-itself at the same time is. That is, being-itself is the absolute ground of the structure of being. “Ground,” in this sense, refers to the ontological condition of the possibility of a finite structure within being. Everything that is, is structured in this way—what it means to be is to be structured in accordance with those structures shared by everything that is. Thus “ground” is a transcendental term referring to the dynamic of the power of being, nonbeing, and their unity as the condition of the possibility of the structural elements shared by all that is. We can think about and apprehend being-itself only in and through the dynamic structure of the self-manifestation of being-itself. Being-itself unites the power of being and its overcoming of nonbeing in the “divine life.” Indeed, in this interpretation it is precisely the active
dialectic of the structure which makes possible the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being—or, in the religious symbolism, allows for the divine life.

**Being and the Structure of Being**

Most basically, “being” means the connection between a concept (i.e., a universal) and a percept (i.e., a particular). Hence, a being is a discrete, concrete entity that displays a connection between a universal and a particular. “Tree,” as a concept, is a universal; all things that fit the definition, “A perennial woody plant having a main trunk and usually a distinct crown,” are trees. When I then say, “This is a tree” I point to a concrete and discrete entity that displays the connection between my perceptions including “brown,” “rough,” “green,” “rustling sound” and the concept that unites all these perceptions: “tree.”

Yet “being” refers not only to individual entities, beings, but also to the (presumed) whole of all things that are. The whole of beings is a difficult concept, for we can never grasp all that there is, was, and shall be in perception or in cognition. Yet, because all things are structured by a structure grounded in unity, the whole of things can be experienced—or perhaps it is better to say intuited—to be an ungraspable whole. Moreover, being in the sense of the whole of reality remains subject to the structure of being and is thus finite and determined. This is the case because even the whole of all that is, is grounded and is structured, and is therefore contingent. When we imaginatively consider all of the things that there are, were, and will be, we formulate a concept—“cosmos,” “universe,” reality,” the intuition that all perceptions we have had and are having form a unified totality. At the same time, however, we are aware that there is no
percept that can fall under the concept of the totality of being as the perceived tree falls under the concept of “tree.” Hence, “being” takes on two distinct but fundamentally related meanings. When the word “being” is not specifically modified (as in “a being” or “created beings”) we will reserve the use of “being” to mean the structured, collective whole of all that is, retaining the term “being-itself” as the infinite unity grounding the structure of being. Here the structure of being must be defined as the connectedness of universality and particularity in everything that is—whether in each individual or in the structured whole of reality.

“Being” should thus be understood as the self-manifestation of being-itself in the divine life made possible by the dialectic of the power of being and nonbeing. As such, “being” is the third term in the dialectic. The power of being, encountering and overcoming nonbeing, takes nonbeing up into itself in the structure of the collective whole of all that is—that is, of reality as such—as well as the being of all entities:

Nonbeing belongs to being, it cannot be separated from it. We could not even think “being” without a double negation: being must be thought as the negation of the negation of being. . . . If we speak of the power of being-itself we indicate that being affirms itself against nonbeing. . . . The self-affirmation of being without nonbeing would not even be self-affirmation but an immovable self-identity. Nothing would be manifest, nothing expressed, nothing revealed. But nonbeing drives being out of its seclusion, it forces it to affirm itself dynamically. . . . Nonbeing (that in God which makes his self-affirmation dynamic) opens up the divine self-seclusion and reveals him as power and love. Nonbeing makes God a living God. 

The structure of being is thus both eternal and dynamic. In God’s eternity as being-itself, and especially as ground of the structure of being, God does not change. The structure is itself eternal, transcending and unifying “dynamics and form,” along with “individuality and universality,” and “freedom and destiny.” It is in and through the structure itself that God lives and as such participates in finite being.
Power of Being and Nonbeing

“Power of being” will refer to the basic ontological principle whereby being overcomes “nonbeing,” where “nonbeing” is to be understood as an equally basic and active ontological principle within being-itself. The power of being appears in everything that is, but is not itself a thing. The power of being is the vital force making possible anything that is, and it does so only through connection with nonbeing and through the structure of being. Just so, where “being” was defined as the connection between percept and concept, particular and universal, nonbeing refers to the negation of that connection. In terms of absolute and relative nonbeing (to be discussed below), absolute nonbeing refers to the possibility of the negation of all such connection, actual and potential, and relative nonbeing refers to the possible negation of particular connections. In the first sense it is a matter of the question “Why not nothing?” and in the second sense it is a matter of the statement “This is no tree.”

As an active ontological principle, however, nonbeing is not simple negation, though it is that at base. Just as much as the power of being, nonbeing determines a thing in its existence. In terms of absolute nonbeing, a thing is determined as a thing insofar as it stands out of nonbeing. In terms of relative nonbeing (and universal concepts), a thing is determined as the thing that it is by definition—that is, by being a particular and concrete instantiation of a determinate species belonging to a determinate genus, which means being differentiated from other species within the same genus and other genera within the whole of being. This determines the thing in existential terms, insofar as it makes a thing the thing that it is, as something that exists in the world for some self.
Existence

To exist is to stand out of nonbeing and potential being. Tillich puts the point in this way:

The root meaning of “to exist,” in Latin *existere*, is to “stand out”. . . . Existing can mean standing out of absolute nonbeing, while remaining in it; it can mean finitude, the unity of being and non-being. And existing can mean standing out of relative nonbeing, while remaining in it; it can mean actuality, the unity of actual being and the resistance against it. But whether we use the one or the other meaning of nonbeing, existence means standing out of non-being.13

In other words, by the mere fact that a thing *is*, it stands out of absolute nonbeing. By the fact that it is the thing that it is, it stands out of relative nonbeing as a mixture of being and nonbeing, as everything finite does. It stands out of the whole of things as the thing that it is. And it stands out of potentiality into actuality. It is significant to note here that though Tillich follows Heidegger structurally and analytically on a number of important points he differs on his understanding of existence. “Surprisingly, Tillich does not follow the general trend of the existentialists in reserving the word ‘existence’ for the being of that unique entity, man,” Adrian Thatcher remarks. “It is instead a realm of being which covers everything finite, and leads to estrangement.”14

Hence we have covered a number of important preliminary definitions. Many more remain to be articulated—such as “self” and “world,” for instance—but what remains will develop the above principles and concepts. Further, those that have been defined in a preliminary way will need to be further analyzed in their meanings and implications. It is the task of this chapter to undertake that development, again as the preparatory analysis of ontological concepts for the purpose of discovering the
transcendental constitution of our concept of Nature, its correlated symbol, Gaia, and the theological implications of the correlation. Hence we turn now to that analysis.

**Being and Nonbeing in Dialectic**

If God is a living God through the self-manifestation of being-itself as the power of being dynamically and dialectically overcoming nonbeing, we must then clarify both of these concepts. We have seen that being-itself is the unifying principle of the polarities structuring being, and that the dynamic self-manifestation of being-itself—symbolized in terms of the divine life—is the instantiation of that unity as the third term of the dialectic of the power of being and nonbeing. We will discuss in more detail the structure of being as Tillich describes it before the end of this first chapter; we will also discuss how Tillich works through the dialectic in terms of the idea of “ground and abyss.” First, however, we must look in more detail at the fundamental ontological concepts: nonbeing and the power of being … and to find a way into these fundamental ontological questions we must consider the ontological question as such, and human reason’s entrance into that question.

**The Ontological Question and the Revelation of Nonbeing**

As the “broadest, as the deepest, and finally as most originary question,” Heidegger writes, the question of being is restricted “only by what is not and never was: by Nothing.” It is this limit, this boundary against which the being asking the question of being is pushed that drives the question to ask for the ground of being: “From what ground do beings come? On what ground do beings stand? To what ground do beings
go?” In asking for the ground of being the question finds the abyss: “it remains an open question whether the ground is a truly grounding, foundation effecting, originary ground,” or “whether the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss.”

As ingredient in the very formulation of the most basic and originary question that beings can ask of being, nonbeing (or the Nothing) is not mere logical contradiction. Rather, in the questioning of being by beings we find that in their very constitution “beings are held out in a questioning manner into the possibility of not-being,” and thus the fundamental philosophical question becomes, “Why are beings torn from the possibility of not-being?” Now, Heidegger claims, we are “searching for a ground that is supposed to ground the dominance of beings as an overcoming of Nothing.”

Thus, once we seriously ask the question of the meaning of being we find that the very form of the question reveals that the self-manifestation of being necessarily includes nonbeing. The question of the meaning of being is itself logically necessary—thought necessarily begins with being, and, in asking after understanding, thought is pushed to this first and most originary question. Moreover, the question of the meaning of being includes the question of nonbeing, again by logical necessity, for all of the reasons discussed above: “Why not nothing?” In being pushed to the limits of thought—to the question of the meaning of being—thought is faced with the question of nonbeing. But... is the logic of the question a fitting guide to ontology?

For Heidegger, finding the right way into the question of the meaning of being is crucial, and finding the way into this question means finding the way into the hermeneutic circle as he sees it. No longer simply a matter of textual interpretation for Heidegger, the hermeneutic relation of part and whole concerns “the interplay between
our self-understanding and our understanding of the world,“ as Bjørn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal put it. “Because Dasein is fundamentally embedded in the world, we simply cannot understand ourselves without the detour through the world, and the world cannot be understood without reference to Dasein’s way of life.” More, though, Dasein is that being that asks the question of being, that asks what it is to be. Thus, we cannot understand Dasein’s way of being without understanding being, but neither can we understand being without understanding what it is to be the being that can ask the question of being as a mode of its being. Hence the hermeneutic circle becomes an existential issue, for the interpretive interplay of part and whole is instantiated at the ontological level. To understand that the logic of the question of being can be a guide to ontology, rather than simply a logical circle, we must understand that for Heidegger questioning is a mode of being—a way of being of the being that asks the question of being as an existential challenge—and we must understand that the form of that question is necessarily rooted in the being of human being.

“Every question is a seeking,” Heidegger writes in the Introduction to Being and Time. “Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought.” For Dasein to be able to ask the question of the meaning of being, Dasein must somehow be directed in its asking by the being of which its asking is a mode. That is, as Dasein is a being that asks, asking is a mode of being, a way of being, and thus an analysis of the question as a mode of being of that being that asks provides a way into the hermeneutic circle and gives the question direction. “As what is really intended, what is to be ascertained lies in what is questioned,” Heidegger puts the point. “As an attitude adopted by a being, the questioner, questioning has its own character of being.” Thus, while we do not know
the meaning of being in the asking, the asking itself is guided by a pre-understanding according to which being is to be questioned. That is, being is an *issue* for us, and it could not be an issue for us unless the meaning of being somehow appeared to thought as a question.

Sill, we are left with only a question and a vague sense of what is sought in the questioning—how then do we enter the question such that we can be guided by it. Already we have a clue: “Insofar as beings constitute what is asked about, and insofar as being means the being of beings, beings themselves turn out to be what is interrogated in the question of being.” But now a new question must be asked: “In which being is the meaning of being to be found; from which being is the disclosure of being to set its start?” And of course it is through an analysis of that being that asks the question of being as a mode of its being that this disclosure can get its start: “Regarding, understanding and grasping, choosing, and gaining access to, are constitutive attitudes of a particular being, of the being we inquirers ourselves in each case are. Thus to work out the question of being means to make a being—one who questions—transparent in its being. Asking this question, as a mode of being of a being, is itself essentially determined by what is asked about in it—being.”

Thus we have a provisional answer to the question at hand—not, of course to the question of the meaning of being, but the question of whether the logic of the ontological question is a fitting guide to ontology as such. It can be a fitting guide, when asked rigorously and with an eye to the hermeneutical-existential relation of self and world, because as a mode of being of the being questioning the meaning of being, the question is guided in its seeking by what is sought. This is so precisely because what is asked about
appears in and determines the being of the questioner as it questions. Therefore, where the question reveals an essential, necessary logic, that logic is itself a revelation of the meaning of being. Dasein “is the site of the understanding of being.” 21 (One could perhaps even say with Hegel that the human being is the site of the self-understanding of God.)

It is not enough, though, to simply identify the primary being to be interrogated—“an explicit appropriation and securing of correct access to this being is required.” For Heidegger, this means first analyzing Dasein in its “average everydayness,” seeking its distinctive ways of being as an entrance to the ontological question. Further, “in accordance with this kind of being belonging to it, Da-sein tends to understand its own being in terms of that being to which it is essentially, continually, and most closely related—the ‘world.’” 22 Thus Heidegger has found a way into the hermeneutic circle that will structure the remainder of the inquiry, and he devotes the rest of Being and Time to this analysis of Dasein, its relation to the world, and the essential structures that constitute Dasein’s existence. Furthermore, as we will see, Tillich makes “self” and “world” the basic structure of being.

Tillich’s ontology develops Heidegger’s analysis in a theological direction. Moreover, Tillich further develops an account of how the structure of human reason connects to—and to a greater and lesser degree agrees with—the structure of being. This argument allows Tillich to affirm that not only is an analysis of human existence a way into the question of being, but that the structures of the answer can be taken as a guide to the structure of being, while remaining suitably aware that human reason is prone to err as a characteristic of its finite existence. That is to say, the connection of human reason
to universal *logos* concerns not only our question of how the logic of the question of being can be a guide to ontology, but also how an analysis of the one who asks the question is a reliable entry into an analysis of the structure of being.

To make his case, Tillich appeals to a classical, or ontological, account of reason: “According to the classical philosophical tradition, reason is the structure of mind which enables the mind to grasp and transform reality.” This is not simply a matter of logical cognition—the mind can grasp reality through artistic, emotional, and other modes of encounter with the world. Still, “this ontological concept of reason always is accompanied and sometimes replaced by the technical concept of reason.”23 Classical and technical reason are principally differentiated, according to Tillich, insofar as classical reason determines ends primarily and means secondarily, while technical reason is concerned with means only, accepting its ends from “somewhere else,” whether that be tradition, conformity to social mores, or other “arbitrary decisions serving the will to power.”24 Yet both technical and classical reason are determined by the ability of the mind to grasp and to shape reality; this is possible because the mind is structured according to the structure of being, and thus structured such that it can grasp the structure of being so as to shape reality.

Hence Tillich offers us the following definitions. “Ontological reason can be defined as the structure of the mind which enables it to grasp and shape reality.” We have seen this already, but Tillich further distinguishes between objective and subjective elements to this structure. “Subjective reason is the structure of mind which enables it to grasp and shape reality on the basis of a corresponding structure of reality,” he explains. On the other hand, “objective reason is the rational structure of reality which the mind
can grasp and according to which it can shape reality.”25 This “according to which” is important: the mind can only shape reality in accordance with the structure of reality—and, presumably, in accordance with the structure of the mind. That is, the power of subjective reason to grasp and shape reality is constrained and guided not only by the structure of subjective reason but especially by the structure of reality.

The fact that the mind can and does grasp and shape reality is a phenomenon. We know that the mind can and does grasp reality because we see it do so on a regular basis. The issue, then, is to describe the possibility of this phenomenon ontologically. Of course, we also know that the mind does not do this perfectly, and this, too, has an ontological explanation. Indeed, while the mind can be seen to grasp and shape reality, this does not necessarily entail that the mind grasps reality as it is in itself—as Kant makes clear, it does so only in and through the structures of subjective reason. Certainly the mind cannot grasp the ground of being directly as it is in itself: Tillich notes that Kant showed that the categories of knowledge are in fact categories of finitude. While the mind can grasp the structure of being, it does so only through the structure of subjective reason and thus cannot get behind those categories to directly grasp being-itself. “They do not enable human reason to grasp reality-in-itself; but they do enable man to grasp his world, the totality of the phenomena which appear to him and constitute his actual experience.”26 As we have noted, it is only in analyzing the self and the world together that the structure of being can be apprehended—Dasein primarily understands itself in terms of its world. Hence, it would be a metaphysical error to assume that reality conforms to human categories of knowing; this was precisely the force of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason.
Meanwhile, however, an analysis of the human being in the world is an entrance to the question of being, and being-itself is apprehended through a consideration of the structures of being. The basic structure of the human being is to be a self in a world; being-itself, as the ground of being, is the depth of being; and the depth of a structure is the principle of its unity. Thus being-itself is the principle that unifies the structural elements of being. (We will deal with this idea of depth in more detail below.) Here, then, we can see our way into the possibility of the connection of subjective and objective reason in knowing. “Knowing,” writes Tillich, “is a form of union. In every act of knowledge the knower and the known are united; the gap between subject and object is overcome.” This overcoming is possible because the knower and what is known share the same basic structure—the structure of being—and because that structure is grounded in the primordial unity of being-itself. “But the union of knowledge is a peculiar one; it is a union through separation. Detachment is the condition of cognitive union.”27 This is necessarily so, because without a detachment of subject and object there could be no dialectical union of the two. There would be only the primordial unity of the ground of being, not the actualized reality of existence.

If the union in knowledge is ontologically a re-union, though, how is this re-union possible? “Reality itself creates structural possibilities within itself,” Tillich answers. “Life, as well as mind, is creative. . . . Living beings are successful attempts of nature to actualize itself in accordance with the demands of objective reason.” Thus, human beings, as living beings, are particular actualizations of nature—as nature is structured according to the structure of being manifest in the demands of objective reason, so is the human being . . . and, as part of the human being, the mind. The human mind has evolved
from nature, through the structure of nature, and in relation to nature in just such a way as to have the structure of mind that makes it able to grasp objective reason. The human mind *must* be structured in accordance with the demands of objective reason: “If nature does not follow these demands, its products are unsuccessful.”

This is the case precisely because the structure of being—the *logos* of objective reason—manifests the grounding depth of being through separation and reunion.

Of course, the fact that knowledge is a re-union of what is separated, grounded in primordial unity, means that human reason is a product of the estrangement characteristic of existence. Hence human reason is subject to distortion, to error. Human reason and the knowledge in which it participates is a finite expression of the self-manifestation of being-itself. “The depth of reason is essentially manifest in reason. But it is hidden in reason under the conditions of existence.”

This theme of separation will be central to our development of an ontological concept of Nature, and we will certainly return to it a number of times. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we must move on to consider the structure of being as such, its basic dynamic, and its ground and abyss. We briefly articulated, as a preliminary task, Heidegger’s and Tillich’s arguments concerning the claim that the necessary logic of the question of being provides not only a way into the question of being but is indeed a reliable guide to that question. Further, we showed that, for Tillich, this is the case because the structure of human reason corresponds in a basic way to the structure of being, and hence logical necessity can be a clue to the structure of being. Both of these arguments implicitly and explicitly rest on the primordial unity of being, expressed as the depth of being, the ground and abyss of being, being-itself. As such, the union of subject
and object characteristic of knowledge is grounded in the basic structure of being, the self-world structure (which we will consider in more detail below), which is itself grounded in the primordial unity of being-itself. This is the ontological condition of the possibility of the mind’s ability to grasp and shape reality. Hence, an analysis of the structure of human reason, properly qualified by awareness that the categories of knowledge are categories of finitude, can make the logic of the question of being a guide to the question of being. And, as we saw at the beginning of this section, when the question of being is asked seriously, the Nothing is brought to thought by unavoidable logical necessity. Hence we turn now to our consideration of nonbeing.

**Nonbeing**

It may seem strange to consider nonbeing before discussing the power of being, to take the negative before the positive. Yet in the ontological shock it is the experience of the negative, the threat of nonbeing in the experience of anxiety, which leads into the question of being as a question. Tillich makes this clear in *The Courage to Be*, and in asking the question of being in terms of anxiety and nonbeing Tillich follows Martin Heidegger, as we have seen in the last section. Tillich shows this structural Heideggerian influence when he writes, “Whenever man has looked at his world, he has found himself in it as a part of it. But he has also realized that he is a stranger in the world of objects, unable to penetrate it beyond a certain level of scientific analysis. And then he has become aware of the fact that he himself is the door to the deeper levels of reality, that in his own existence he has the only possible approach to existence itself.” More to our current point, though, Tillich shows this influence in his understanding of nonbeing,
especially in his claim that nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being. It is where Tillich wants to invoke the power of being as the ontological activity of God making life possible that he turns to nonbeing as a co-equal ontological principle. Hence, to understand Tillich’s idea of the power of being it is necessary to understand the nonbeing that the power of being eternally and absolutely overcomes by taking it into itself. And to understand that requires that we understand Heidegger on the Nothing.

The first thing that we need to re-emphasize is that for Tillich as well as for Heidegger, being does not have nonbeing as its other—neither being-itself nor structured being are faced with an opposing other named nonbeing or the Nothing. Both being-itself and structured being “embrace” nonbeing “as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life.” Structured being includes nonbeing within itself precisely because the active ontological principle of nonbeing in the divine life makes that dialectical structure possible. This point—that nonbeing is always already encountered along with being because nonbeing is ontologically unified with the power of overcoming nonbeing in being as being—is reflected in Heidegger’s first question of philosophy, asked as the opening to his Introduction to Metaphysics: “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” Tillich phrased this question, “Why is there something; why not nothing?” Tillich, along with Heidegger, makes even the question of nonbeing fundamental to the question of being: “Thought is based on being, and it cannot leave this basis; but thought can imagine the negation of everything that is, and it can describe the nature and structure of being which give everything that is the power of resisting nonbeing.”
So, the self-manifestation of the ground of being in structured being reveals that the ground involves nonbeing in the very form of the question. We have dealt with the way that the logic of the question can guide ontological analysis at some length above. Nonbeing is ontologically basic in the question—and since the way into the question is through the question of the being that questions being, the Nothing is revealed to be ontologically basic to the structure of being. It is in his essay “What is Metaphysics?” that Heidegger turns most explicitly to the question, “What about this Nothing?” First, we must understand that the Nothing is not simply the not-this and not-that of logical negation; in fact the Nothing is more original than negation. For Tillich there are two types—or, perhaps, levels—of nonbeing: absolute nonbeing and relative nonbeing.

“Things do exist” means they have being, they stand out of nothingness. But we have learned from the Greek philosophers . . . that non-being can be understood in two ways, namely, as \textit{ouk on}, that is absolute non-being, or as \textit{me on}, that is relative nonbeing. Existing, “to stand out,” refers to both meanings of non-being. If we say that something exists, we assert that it can be found, directly or indirectly, within the corpus of reality. It stands out from the emptiness of absolute non-being. . . . If we say that everything that exists stands out of absolute non-being, we say that it is in both being and non-being. It does not stand completely out of non-being . . . it is a finite, a mixture of being and non-being.

Being-itself cannot be said to be a “mixture of being and non-being,” no matter how much we insist that nonbeing is an active ontological principle. For being is the dialectical unity of opposites grounded in a primordial unity of being-itself, which posits nonbeing in the very act of overcoming it in its self-manifestation. It is in this sense that nonbeing depends on the being it negates: “There could be no negation if there were no preceding affirmation to be negated.” If there is no self-affirming self-manifestation of being-itself, nonbeing \textit{is} not . . . but in positing itself being must simultaneously posit nonbeing as \textit{that which it is not}. Thus nonbeing is ontologically as basic as the power of
being though simultaneously dependent upon it. The active ontological principle of nonbeing is *absolute* nonbeing, that which is infinitely and eternally overcome in the divine life.

Absolute nonbeing is the dialectical No to the eternal Yes of the power of being, and it is what makes God a living God, as we have seen. As existing, beings stand out of absolute nonbeing; but as finite, beings are a mixture of being and nonbeing. In this, beings bring absolute nonbeing into relative nonbeing. Absolute nonbeing as an ingredient of finite being is revealed in anxiety over the possibility of *utterly* being-not. Relative nonbeing, then, concerns the being-not of logical negation: beings are the beings that they are by being neither this other nor that other being. Nonbeing in this sense “is a kind of negative predicate of things because in its relative form it means something like ‘difference’ or ‘limitedness’.” Relative nonbeing actually allows beings to be the beings that they are—it is the principle of negation allowing for differentiation among beings. Moreover, it is precisely because finite beings take their power of resisting nonbeing from their participation in the grounding power of being that they mix the power of being and nonbeing relatively. We will have more to say about this as we proceed.

It is because existence mixes being and nonbeing, and because the being that asks the question of being can function as the way into the ontological question, that nonbeing is found in the very form of the question of being. “But if this question is posed, and provided that it is actually carried out, then this questioning necessarily recoils back from what is asked and what is interrogated, back upon itself,” Heidegger writes. “It runs up against the search for its own Why.” Yet though this recoil suggests a certain limit to our
ability to conceptualize being, it also shows us the way into the question, since the recoil does not produce itself. “Then we discover that the why question has its ground in a leap by which human beings leap away from all the previous safety of their Da-sein, be it genuine or presumed. The asking of this question happens only in the leap and as the leap, and otherwise not at all.”

Not surprisingly, to leap away from the previous safety of our there-being and into the philosophical question is to intentionally face anxiety, to intentionally bring the question “Why not nothing?” into our being as a mode of being. Characteristic of the hermeneutical circle, anxiety as an existential mode of attunement toward being reveals nonbeing, and the existential analysis of anxiety reveals the nothing as ingredient in being as such: “We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this ‘no hold on things’ comes over us and remains,” Heidegger writes.

“This is precisely the place from which Tillich leaps in The Courage to Be, of course. Tillich begins his analysis of existence in that book with an analysis of anxiety, as a basic ontological attunement and signpost into the question of being, analyzed very much in keeping with Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety in Being and Time. “The first assertion about the nature of anxiety,” Tillich writes, is that “anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing.” More, this awareness is existential: “it is not the abstract knowledge of nonbeing which produces anxiety but the awareness that nonbeing is part of one’s own being.” Finally, then, we can conclude with both Heidegger and Tillich that being-there means “being held out into the nothing.” We are threatened in our being by nonbeing relatively and absolutely insofar as we are at all.
The Power of Being

It is clear by this point that the power of being means the “power inherent in everything, the power of resisting nonbeing.” Where the concept of nonbeing was so clearly informed by Heidegger, as we saw in the last section, the concept of power is informed by that “most impressive and effective representative” of Lebensphilosophie, Friedrich Nietzsche. Life, in Nietzsche’s philosophy of life, “is this term of process in which the power of being actualizes itself. But in actualizing itself it overcomes that in life which, although belonging to life, negates life.”

Here we must pause, however, for we continue to speak of the self-overcoming of life, the self-manifestation of being-itself, and this can become problematic if not properly understood. We must ask more directly what “self” can mean when it is conceptually improper to speak of “a self”—particularly where we speak of being-itself as that which grounds the self-world structure and is hence not subject to that structure. Any language referring to “God’s self” must by its very nature be symbolic. This is the case not only because God frequently operates as a religious symbol—indeed, the only non-symbolic thing that can be said about God is that God is being-itself—but more importantly because for God to have a “self” would make God (as being-itself) subject to the self-world structure of being and not its absolute ground. Tillich speaks to this point when he writes, “It is not the function of these concepts to describe the ontological nature of reality in terms of the subjective or objective side of our ordinary experience. It is the function of an ontological concept to use some realm of experience to point to characteristics of being-itself which lie above the split between subjectivity and objectivity and which therefore cannot be expressed literally in terms taken from the
subjective or objective side.” Therefore, though it is problematic to ascribe “self-manifestation” to being-itself—for being-itself as the ground of being is not subject to the self-world structure of being—the locution “self-manifestation” attempts to indicate that there is nothing other than being-itself manifesting or making manifestation possible in structured being.

Hence, as we have seen, Tillich can use the phrase “self-affirmation of being” both for our ability to courageously overcome the threat of nonbeing experienced in anxiety and for the power of being-itself to affirm itself against the nonbeing that it simultaneously posits, embraces, and overcomes. Now, for Nietzsche, “will to power” is a label for the dynamic self-affirmation of life. Nietzsche himself describes this drive toward self-actualization and self-overcoming in the voice of his prophet, Zarathustra:

And life itself told me this secret: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that which must overcome itself again and again.

‘To be sure, you call it will to procreate or impulse toward a goal, towards the higher, more distant, more manifold: but all this is one and one secret.

‘I would rather perish than renounce this one thing; and truly, where there is perishing and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for the sake of power!

‘That I have to be struggle and becoming and goal and conflict of goals: ah, he who divines my will surely divines, too, along what crooked paths it has to go!

‘Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I have to oppose it and my love; thus will my will have it. . . .

‘Only where life is, there is also will: not will to life, but—so I teach you—will to power!

‘The living creature values many things higher than life itself; yet out of this evaluation itself life speaks—the will to power!’

Nietzsche writes thus, to be sure, in opposition to a certain interpretation of Darwinian theory that sees the primary drive of life as the struggle for survival. “The living creature values many things higher than life itself; yet out of this evaluation itself life speaks,” Nietzsche writes—and life evaluates the survival of the individual as well as of the
species to be secondary to the will to self-overcoming of life itself. The will to power, the will of life, here is the will to “overflow, growth, expansion—power.”\textsuperscript{52}

There is more than a refutation of nineteenth-century “English Darwinism” here, however. The passage, “where there is perishing and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself” is of utmost importance to our topic. Nietzsche’s discussion of life as the will to power truly does refer to all forms of life. Where the tree stretches ever upward, toward the sun, sacrificing those parts of itself which are dead for the sake of ever higher growth, life wills to power in Nietzsche’s sense. This also speaks against the common and misinformed interpretation of Nietzsche’s celebration of the will to power as a paean to political violence and tyranny: the tree does not seek to master other trees, it seeks only to grow. Tillich can thus name the concept of power “a fundamental description of being as being.” The naive interpretation which makes Nietzsche the proponent of political mastery at all costs in the name of the will to power utterly fails to understand the concept. The political will to mastery over others is secondary to the will of life to overcome itself by sacrificing itself to itself; and where the political will is not an expression of this will out of an overflowing of life, then it becomes weakness, sickness. As Tillich puts the point, “The will to power is not the will of men to attain power over men, but the self affirmation of life in its self-transcending dynamics, overcoming internal and external resistance.” Hence, even though the tree does not possess psyche (and thus not the psychological attribute of will), \textit{per se}, it does express and manifest the power of being as “the drive of everything living to realize itself with increasing intensity and extensity.”\textsuperscript{53}
Therefore, keeping the above considerations in mind, the power of being can be defined as follows: “the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negation. It is the possibility of overcoming non-being.” The internal resistance which the power of being overcomes is, of course, absolute nonbeing; relative nonbeing is the internal and external resistance that limits finite being. Relative nonbeing is internal to being as the limiting principle that allows beings to be what they are, as well as the instantiation of absolute nonbeing in the structured self-manifestation of being-itself in being—relative nonbeing is external to beings as that which confronts them, as that which manifests as limit and lack. Since God is manifest as the power of being, God is the ultimate, the absolute, indeed the only power to be. It is only insofar as beings are empowered by God that they are at all—this, for Tillich, is the meaning of the religious symbol “the creation.” Still, “the power of being becomes manifest only in the process in which it actualizes its power.” The power of being is posited along with nonbeing as the possibility of the self-actualization of being-itself, and this actualization is symbolized as the divine life. Conceptually, however, the process in which the power of being is manifest is in the dynamic dialectic played out through the structure of being.

**The Structure of Being**

We have seen that the theological-ontological question arises from the ontological shock, the existential confrontation with nonbeing experienced in anxiety and philosophically formulated in the metaphysical question, “Why is there something; why not nothing?” We have further seen that this allows both Heidegger and Tillich to approach the question of being beginning in an analysis of “that being who asks the
ontological question and in whose self-awareness the ontological answer can be found."56 Yet how can we approach the question of being as such—that is, beyond analysis of human beings as human beings—beyond the empty tautology “being is being”?57 This question is especially pressing due to the fact that thought is based on being; it must begin with being and it cannot go behind being. We will come back to this issue when we discuss the idea of being-itself as the ground and abyss of being later in this first chapter. Yet while in the end we must recognize the depth dimension of being, we need to first articulate the structure of being as Tillich understands it, and we must do this precisely because structured being operates as the third term of the dynamic dialectic of the manifestation of being-itself.

Structured being is the third term of the dialectic interplay of power of being and nonbeing, the unity of both in the self-manifestation of being-itself. Being-itself must thus be understood as the primordial, essential unity, while structured being unites that which is essentially unified but dialectically separated as the condition for the possibility of existence. It is for this reason that Tillich can hold that being-itself is the structure of being while not subject to that structure. Further, it is for this reason that thought can cognitively approach God through a contemplation of the structural elements of being.58 Finally, given this dialectical understanding of being, we must be careful not to posit two distinct entities or phenomena: being-itself as the ground of being and structured being as grounded being. The distinction may be necessary conceptually for the purpose of ontological analysis—it is certainly linguistically useful—but it is not ultimately valid. Being-itself is fundamentally primordial unity, while structured being is the ordered unity that takes nonbeing into the power of resisting nonbeing as the self-manifestation of the
primordial unity. This is an eternal process, the fundamental ontological structure shared by everything that is—and everything that is shares this structure through participation in the power of being.

Here ontology merges with a particular sort of metaphysical inquiry. Tillich is careful to reject the sort of metaphysics that abstracts from experience to explain existence through appeal to a supernatural realm apart from and above the physical realm, “the realm of the divine above nature.” As we saw in the Introduction, this is precisely the sort of metaphysics that gives rise to the modern challenge to religion that Tillich is responding to. Indeed, in his later work Tillich rejects the term “metaphysics” altogether because he suspects that the connotations of supernaturalism and “looking at the clouds” cannot be avoided. Yet in other places he describes ontology and the valid sense of metaphysics in much the same way. In the 1954 *Love, Power, and Justice*, for example, Tillich writes, “Ontology does not try to describe the nature of beings, either in their universal, generic qualities, or in their individual, historical manifestations. It does not ask about stars and plants, animals and men. . . . But ontology asks the simple and infinitely difficult question: What does it mean to be? What are the structures, common to everything that is, to everything that participates in being?”

Two years later, in “Relation of Metaphysics and Theology” Tillich defines metaphysics as “the analysis of those elements in the encountered reality which belong to its general structure and make experience universally possible. Metaphysics is then the rational inquiry into the structure of being, its polarities and categories as they appear in man’s encounter with reality.” Ontology concerns the structure of being which manifests the dynamic instantiation of being-itself in existence—being-itself can only be approached through a
consideration of those structures that are common to everything that is, that make 
experience possible, and that appear in the human encounter with reality. What are these 
structures?

First, we must understand that ontological concepts are “a priori in the strict sense 
of the word,” according to Tillich. “They determine the nature of experience.” As such, 
they are “presupposed in every actual experience, since they constitute the very nature of 
experience itself.” Here, of course, Tillich is drawing upon Kant. (As we will see, 
however, he is channeling Kant’s transcendental idealism through a Heideggerian lens.) 
Since the being that asks the question of being is the way into the hermeneutic circle—
since it is in the human being that being can ask the question of being—the analysis of 
experience that seeks the transcendental constitution of experience will provide clues for 
the ontological analysis. Human beings are the way into the question of being precisely 
because they “experience directly the structure of being and its elements.” These a 
priori concepts fall into four classifications for Tillich: first, Tillich analyzes the basic 
ontological structure, the self-world structure; second, he looks to the ontological 
elements that constitute the structure of being; third, he considers the conditions of 
existence; fourth and finally he treats the most important categories of being and 
knowing. In the following discussion we will consider the first and second classifications 
separately and the third and fourth together.

*The Basic Ontological Structure*

In their experience, human beings are “aware of the structures which make 
cognition possible.” We live in them and act through them. In cognition—in thinking
about being (or about anything that is)—we are immediately aware that thinking is structured according to the subject-object polarity. In thought, I am always the thinking subject, thinking *about* something, the object of thought. Through this basic structure of cognition we find our way into the basic ontological structure—the condition of the possibility of the subject-object structure of cognition: “Man experiences himself as having a world to which he belongs. The basic ontological structure”—that is, the self-world structure—“is derived from an analysis of this complex dialectical relationship.”

The *self* according to Tillich is more embracing than *ego*, whether in the Cartesian or Freudian sense. “A self is not a thing that may or may not exist; it is an original phenomenon which logically precedes all questions of existence.” The self is the principle of self-relatedness and centeredness that makes a thing *a thing*, *the* thing that it *is*. This is due to the ontological element of identity (which we will consider below).

Here, we note that it is the element of identity that appears in human experience as self—hence, rocks have identity, in that they are the things that they are as a structured whole, while the element of identity in the human being is expressed as the self. Thus, Tillich’s idea of self involves centeredness, self-relatedness, structure, and wholeness—for Tillich, this is what it means for a self to be a self—to be itself. Furthermore, to be also means to be separate from other things: “Being a self means being separated in some way from everything else,” Tillich writes. “At the same time, however, this self is aware that it belongs to that at which it looks.” Hence the subject-object structure of cognition reveals the self-world structure of being; the self-world structure reveals that the subject that looks at an object belongs together with the object in the world; at the same time that the object is itself a self.
Hence, there can be no self without world. Self and world are found together—each constitutes the other, and as we saw this is constitutive of the considerations leading into the hermeneutic circle. Here again Tillich is drawing upon a Heideggerian sense of world. "The understanding of a totality of relevance inherent in circumspect taking care is grounded in a previous understanding of the relations of in-order-to, what-for, for-that, and for-the-sake-of-which. We set forth the connections of these relations as significance," Heidegger writes. "Their unity constitutes what we call world." The "world" for Heidegger is thus the manifold unity of a context of references, and Tillich is picking up this use. This web of "concepts, roles, and functions" is, furthermore, grounded in the being of Dasein—as Stephen Mulhall points out,

such totalities of involvement are always ultimately grounded in a reference-relation in which there is no further involvement—a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ that pertains to the being of Dasein. . . . In other words, the modes of practical activity within which entities are primarily encountered are by their nature contributors to Dasein’s modes of existence in the world—to specific existentiell possibilities. In this sense, the ontological structures of worldhood are and must be existentially understood. The world is a facet of the being of Dasein; Dasein’s Being is Being-in-the-world.

Hence, again, we see that self and world are primordially found together—and this is so, as we have seen above and will see again and again, because both self and world are manifold unities that share the structure of reason. It is also important to note here the difference between world and environment.

The world to which the self belongs is not simply its environment. Human beings have environment, but their world transcends it. Non-human things have an environment but do not have a world in the strict sense, according to Tillich, just as they do not necessarily have a self in the strict sense of self-awareness. Any thing has and belongs to its environment, defined as “those things with which it has an active interrelation."
Insofar as a human being has a set of things with which it has active interrelation it has environment. Yet where non-human things are bound to their environments, “man is never bound completely to an environment. He always transcends it by grasping and shaping it according to universal norms and ideas”—that is, according to an understanding of the manifold unity of reciprocal referential relations, structured according to the logos structure. The world, therefore, is both something that we are in and something that we have. It is not the “sum total of all beings” but “a structured unity of manifoldness.” Thus, human beings, as selves, find themselves not only along with other selves but also in, of, and along with a world that is a structured whole as well. It is this structural symmetry that allows the existential analysis to move into ontological considerations…and that allows ontic grasping of the world and of parts of the world.

The self is in the world, part of it, dependent upon it, and is simultaneously separated from it as a self faced with a world, distinct from it—and in a very real way threatened by it. (This dynamic will be central to our discussion of Nature as an ontological concept.) “When man looks at his world, he looks at himself as an infinitely small part of his world,” Tillich observes. “Although he is the perspective-center, he becomes a particle of what is centered in him, a particle of the universe. This structure enables man to encounter himself.” Thus the human being finds both the self and the world together as the transcendental condition for the possibility of cognition, and does so through cognition itself.

The subject-object structure of cognition is rooted in the self-world structure of existence, and this structure is basic insofar as everything that is, is found to be what it is through this dynamic. “The self-world polarity is the basis of the subject-object structure
of reason,” Tillich explains.\textsuperscript{75} This is the case precisely because both self and world relate as structured wholes and because the self is not only separated from the world but is always already part of it, and because each is structured according to the structure of being manifest in logos and in subjective reason. The self—the basis of the cognitive subject—encounters itself through cognition to be a part of that which it considers through reason—the world. As such, both self (subject) and world (manifold unity of object-relations) are primordially unified, allowing for cognition to be possible, and allowing for human reason to grasp and shape the world. Hence Tillich can call the structure of the self “subjective reason” and the structure of the world “objective reason,” and find both to be united in the basic structure of being. Furthermore, it is reason—the logos—that keeps both self and world from chaos: “Reason makes the self a self, namely a centered structure; and reason makes the world a world, namely a structured whole. Without reason, without the logos of being, being would be chaos, that is, it would not be being but only the possibility of it.”\textsuperscript{76} Through reason, self and world exist in interdependence… and thus Tillich has articulated precisely how it is that the being that asks the question of being can effectively ask that question, how Dasein can be the way into the hermeneutic circle: self and world, subject and object, being and being are united through reason in a primordial unity that is the condition for the possibility of thought finding truth.

The subject-object structure thus points back to the original and essential unity of being, and it is because subject and object, self and world, are essentially unified in being-itself and polarized but co-determining in existence that reason structures both. The world is a structured whole, and we find it to be such—we are as part of the world
and simultaneously separated from it, and we find ourselves to be such. We make the
world no more than we make ourselves (though we are responsible for our own destiny in
a very real way, as we will see when we consider Tillich’s idea of freedom). The world
and the self make each other. Thus Tillich can write, “The basic ontological structure
cannot be derived. It must be accepted.” (Here it must be noted that in a very real sense
the basic ontological structure can be derived logically—that is, knowing the subject-
object structure of cognition precedes knowing the self-world structure of being, although
the self-world structure of being is ontologically primordial and hence grounds the
the duality of self and world, of subject and object?’ is a question in which reason looks
into its own abyss—an abyss in which distinction and derivation disappear.” On the
one hand, the self-world structure is united through reason, as has been maintained
throughout—on the other hand, though, where reason looks to its own ground it finds the
limits of reason, the inability of reason to grasp and shape its own ground. That ground
is, of course, being-itself: the primordial unity incorporating and transcending the polar
elements constituting the structure of being.

_The Ontological Elements_

The ontological elements constitute the basic ontological structure—they form the
dynamic self-manifestation of the divine life. Like the basic self-world structure of being
(and its manifestation in cognition, the subject-object structure), the ontological elements
are polarities. The first term of each polarity “expresses the self-relatedness of being, its
power of being something for itself.” The second term “expresses the belongingness of being, its character of being a part of a universe of being.”

The first polarity of ontological elements is individualization and participation. As ontological elements, individualization and participation are qualities of everything. Self and world are fully present in the human being; individualization and participation are the first constitutive elements making self and world possible as the basic structure of being. “Selfhood and individualization are different conceptually,” Tillich notes, “but actually they are inseparable.” Though it is difficult to see the distinction, we have touched upon it in distinguishing the self as self-conscious from non-human entities. Everything that is, is an individual thing—not everything that is, is conscious of being, and therefore is not conscious of being a self. Thus it seems that the self-world structure is basic because it is discovered by means of discovering with the subject-object structure as the condition of the possibility of cognition, while the first polarity of ontological elements is essential for the self-world structure. In other words, the self-world structure is an emergent form of thought that cognitively presupposes discovery of the subject-object structure. The emergent form of thought is, however, ontologically more basic—the self-world structure of being makes possible the subject-object structure of cognition.

Tillich further emphasizes this distinction when he remarks, “The species is dominant in all nonhuman beings,” and that “essentially the individual is an exemplar” of the species. In human beings the individual is the aim of the species, Tillich suggests, because the human being, as fully centered, is a self. Again, Tillich is following Heidegger here; and, again, Mulhall explicates this point (from the perspective of Being and Time) quite cogently:
tables and chairs cannot relate themselves to their own Being, not even as a matter of indifference. They have properties, some of which (what Heidegger will term their ‘categories’) go to make up their essence, but Dasein has—or rather is—possibilities; insofar as it has an essence, it consists in existence . . . . But this means that human lives, unlike those of other creatures, are capable of manifesting individuality. Birds and rabbits live out their lives in ways determined by imperatives and behavior patterns deriving from their species-identity; they instantiate their species. However, entities whose Being is in each case mine can allow what they are to be informed by, or infused with, who they are (or fail to do so).\textsuperscript{81}

Here we should note the difference in Mulhall’s more “average-everyday” use of the term “individuality” in contrast with Tillich’s. As we are showing, Tillich’s use indicates the element of being that makes each thing the thing that is it, while Mulhall’s sense of individuality is reflected in the idea that Dasein can make what it is become informed by who it is as a self within the world. In any case, this points to the idea that nonhuman life participates in its environment while human life has a world. “An individual leaf participates in the natural structures and forces which act upon it and which are acted upon by it,” while in the human being the structured unity of manifoldness that is the world “is present not only unconsciously but in a conscious encounter. Man participates in the universe through the rational structure of mind and reality.” We touched on this point above, but here Tillich makes the point especially clear: “he participates in the universe because the universal structures, forms, and laws are open to him.”\textsuperscript{82} Because both self and world are structured wholes—that is, because they are structured—human reason allows us to shape and grasp being in a directed, conscious, and intentional way beyond basic biological processes.

The second polarity of ontological elements is dynamics and form. What an entity is, is indistinguishable from the structure that makes it the thing it is, and it is the structure of beings—the form—that gives reason the power to grasp and shape being.\textsuperscript{83}
To be is to be some entity, to be an individual, and this means to have a form. The form makes the thing the thing that it is; Tillich calls this form the thing’s “definite power of being.” That single adjective, “definite,” carries a great deal of analytical weight. In the first section of this chapter we saw that the fundamental dialectic of the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being is the power of being overcoming nonbeing; we also saw that in structured being, nonbeing and being are mixed such that nonbeing limits being. The adjective “definite,” then, denotes the set limits that make a thing the thing that it is. The power of being participating in and thus creating the thing is mixed with nonbeing in the very form of the individual at the level of constitutive ontological elements.

Yet, “Every form forms something”—indeed, this is the very meaning of form—but the form does not simply form the individual thing. Metaphysics since the earliest philosophical speculations has asked what it is that is formed to create the thing that has form. Tillich, too, asks this question: “What is this ‘something’? We have called it dynamics,” and the predecessor term is “matter” or “substance.” This is an idea with an incredibly complex philosophical history, as Tillich notes, and it would require space beyond the scope of this chapter to parse out all its variations. Here we can simply follow Tillich’s reasoning that “everything which can be conceptualized must have being,” and that “there is no being without form.” Thus this fundamental “something” that is formed cannot accurately be thought of as some thing—but neither can it be thought of as something that is not. (Historically, a central metaphysical problem has been to determine just what matter is—here, Tillich dismisses the question on systemic principle. As we will see presently, describing what substance is apart from the form it
takes is incoherent on Tillich’s account.) For Tillich, dynamics is the potentiality of being: “nonbeing in contrast to things that have form” and “the power of being in contrast to pure nonbeing.” This ambiguity points to the fact that that which is formed but which itself has no form apart from the individual being—symbolized in the religious symbol “chaos” as well as in Nietzsche’s oft-misunderstood phrase “will to power”—“points symbolically to that which cannot be named.” Here the metaphysical error, akin to seeing will to power as a psychological attribute directed toward political mastery, is to take dynamics (or “matter,” or “substance”) as a thing that can be described. Of course it cannot, as Tillich makes clear, precisely because dynamics and form can only be conceptualized together. Trying to ask after what there is apart from or prior to form leads to the abyss in which distinction and derivation disappear, just as does asking what precedes self and world.

Still, dynamics and form can be known insofar as they can be experienced, and they can be experienced because they are constitutive of the being of which we are a part. “The polarity of dynamics and form appears in man’s immediate experience as the polar structure of vitality and intentionality.” Vitality here is the “power which keeps a living being alive and growing,” and thus manifests the participation of the power of being in individual beings as “the creative drive of the living substance in everything that lives toward new forms.” Intentionality, meanwhile, points to “being related to meaningful structures, living in universals, grasping and shaping reality,” and “living in tension with (and toward) something objectively valid.” Here we find, once again, resonance with the language Tillich used in describing self and world, subject and object, and
individualization and participation, and rightfully so, since each is fundamentally related as constitutive of the structure of being.

But the operation of dynamics and form experienced in the environment as growth and shaping points still more directly to the living nature of being in a way that will be essential to our discussion of Gaia: “The dynamic character of being implies the tendency of everything to transcend itself and to create new forms. At the same time everything tends to conserve its own form as the basis of its self-transcendence.” This is what it means to live: self-transcendence creating new forms while conserving the form that allows for growth. To grow and change while remaining that which has grown and changed is what it is to live, and here we see the necessity of understanding dynamics and form together in concrete action. This operation is “experienced immediately by man in man himself,” especially in the creation and manipulation of our world through the creation of “a new world of technical tools and a world of cultural forms.” In the human being, then, is nature’s ultimate self-transcendence: humans evolve—they are in and of nature—and in that evolution they transcend the purely biological. Human creation breaks through the biological domain to which we belong “and establishes new realms never attainable on a nonhuman level.” Yet, though we transcend the biological in this way, we can never forget that it is Nature, and ultimately being-itself, that transcends itself through us in and through evolution.

Finally, the third polarity of ontological elements is freedom and destiny. With this polarity, Tillich claims, we come to a turning point. “Freedom in polarity with destiny,” he writes, “is the structural element which makes existence possible because it transcends the essential necessity of being without destroying it.” Destiny is not
necessity, understood in terms of determinism—necessity is not an ontological element, according to Tillich, but one of the categories of being and knowing. Interestingly, necessity is not one of the categories discussed in the Systematic Theology. Perhaps the category of necessity is “not especially discussed” because it has “no direct theological significance,” as categories like quantity and quality have. (Though Tillich does not clarify criteria determining why certain ontological categories have theological significance and others do not.) In any case, the ontological elements constitute the basic ontological structure making existence possible—the categories are those a priori concepts that the understanding uses to construct experience. Here Tillich is clearly following Kant, and indeed necessity is one of Kant’s twelve categories, falling under the heading of “Modality” along with actuality and possibility. Hence, where the elements make existence itself possible, constitutively, the categories allow reason to grasp being. Further, it is with freedom and destiny that being is able to truly go out beyond itself, informed by the earlier polarities of individualization and universality and dynamics and form.

We will more fully discuss the categories as such in the next section of this chapter, but it is productive to follow Tillich in distinguishing destiny from the category he does not discuss, necessity. As we have seen, for Kant the category of necessity falls under the heading of modality. Here Kant is extremely difficult, and it is not the purpose of this project to unpack Kant on modality. Let us simply note that modality has to do with the manner in which a statement of truth holds. Hence, a statement could be possibly true but not actually true, or it could be necessarily true and thus true universally. Anand Vaidya explains the distinction as follows:
Regarding modality, Kant held the view that necessity is the same as universality. Contemporary metaphysicians of modality typically do not gloss necessity as universality. Thus, for the purposes of this discussion it is best to interpret Kant as holding the view that necessity is truth in all possible worlds; and that contingency is truth in some possible world, but not all possible worlds. . . . Kant is thus often seen as being the first philosopher to set up a partial semantic approach to the epistemology of modality. In some cases, one can obtain knowledge of necessity by looking at meaning. If a statement $S$ is analytic, then $S$ is $a$ $priori$, in which case $S$ is necessary. And one can obtain knowledge of contingency through sense experience.\textsuperscript{95}

For Kant, actuality concerns the bare fact of a thing, and thus knowledge of actuality can only be $a$ $posteriori$. Vaidya seems to equate this to contingency, where one can, upon observation, find out that a thing is actual and has particular causes, but cannot know that the thing must be the way it is—indeed, the very definition of contingency implies that a thing may have been otherwise. Possibility concerns the conditions for the necessity of a thing but is neither the actuality nor the necessity of that thing. Necessity, then, concerns that which must be under all possible conditions.

Hence, necessity for Kant is contrasted with possibility, not with freedom, while for Tillich the element paired with freedom is destiny, not necessity. Moreover, for Kant, the cause of my action can be within my control now only if it is not in time. . . . For transcendental idealism allows that the cause of my action may be a thing in itself outside of time: namely, my noumenal self, which is free because it is not part of nature. No matter what kind of character I have developed or what external influences act on me, on Kant's view all of my intentional, voluntary actions are immediate effects of my noumenal self, which is causally undetermined.\textsuperscript{96}

Here is where Tillich will have a problem. On the one hand, as we will see, Tillich claims that time “is the central category of finitude,” involving both transitoriness and creativity.\textsuperscript{97} The human self is finite, and thus conditioned by the marks of time: it is transitory and, more importantly, the primary bearer of the free creativity of being.

Tillich never imagines the eternal, unchanging existence of the soul, the view
characteristic of Kant’s position. More to the point, though, Tillich holds that freedom—like individualization and dynamics—is an element constituting the basic structure of existence, and thus nothing that exists can fail to involve these elements, and they must be found in experience. Necessity contrasted with freedom indicates that the self is either mechanistically determined or indeterminate but contingent, and for Tillich this does not grasp the structure of being as it is experienced—the distinction between utter determinism or random indeterminacy may be the logical outcome of a self that exists apart from all causality, but it is a false dichotomy based in an ontological misunderstanding.

Tillich can hold this because he has already developed a detailed analysis of prior ontological elements concerning the self-relatedness of being (individualization, dynamics, and now freedom) and the belongingness of being (participation, form, and now destiny). “Man experiences the structure of the individual as the bearer of freedom within the larger structures to which the individual structure belongs,” Tillich explains. Thus the free self is not like Kant’s “noumenal self,” apart from nature, outside of time, and completely undetermined—it exists as a structure within larger structures, all of which ontologically share the same elemental constitution. But the free self, neither mechanistically determined nor entirely apart from causality, partakes in shaping its own destiny. As individual, it makes itself what it is, insofar as its range of possibilities allows it, as participating in a structured world within which the range of possibility is given. “Destiny points to this situation in which man finds himself, facing the world to which, at the same time, he belongs.”
Thus, freedom is not an attribute or function of some thing called “the will”—it is an ontological condition of a fully centered self in its total processes. In other words, selfhood is the condition for the possibility of freedom. And as such, freedom is experienced by the self as an element of its being, as “deliberation, decision, and responsibility.” Deliberation here involves weighing arguments and motives, where the centered person “does the weighing and reacts as a whole.” This presents a picture of a self which is both an amalgamation of competing motives, drives, and desires, as Nietzsche envisioned, and a structured unity of manifoldness that responds as a whole to conflicts of drives, as Kant and Descartes envisioned. Decisions made by the self, of course, cut off some possibilities in favor of others, and this is precisely how the self is responsible for creating its own destiny. Finally, responsibility “points to the obligation of the person who has freedom to respond if he is questioned about his decisions.” The self must respond because “his actions are determined neither by something outside of him nor by any part of him but by the centered totality of his being.” Thus we can see how it is that freedom (along with all of the other ontological elements) constitutively explains what it means for a self to be a self.

This raises the question of whether the centered self, acting in freedom, transcends its own finitude. In some ways it does. In freedom, the human being can choose, and as rational the human being can choose on the basis of infinite potential. That is, reason, which for Tillich is grounded in language, allows the human being the ability to grasp and shape its world. Tillich writes:

Man participates in the universe through the rational structure of mind and reality. Considered environmentally, he participates in a very small section of reality; he is surpassed in some respects by migrating animals. Considered cosmically, he participates in the universe because the universal structures, forms, and laws are
open to him. Actually man’s participation is always limited. Potentially there are no limits he could not transcend. The universals make man universal; language proves that he is *microcosmos*. Through the universals man participates in the remotest stars and the remotest past. This is the ontological basis for the assertion that knowledge is union and that it is rooted in the *erōs* which reunites elements which essentially belong to each other.  

It is because, through language, the human being has access to universals—or concepts—that the human being participates in creation not only in growth but in freedom. Thus:

The dynamic element in man is open in all directions; it is bound by no a priori limiting structure. Man is able to create a world beyond the given world; he creates the technical and spiritual realms. The dynamics of subhuman life remain within the limits of natural necessity, notwithstanding the infinite variations it produces and notwithstanding the new forms created by the evolutionary process. Dynamics reaches out beyond nature only in man.

Since the human being participates with infinite potential in reality, in principle humanity can reach out beyond nature indefinitely. (In Parts Two and Three, however, we will see that the human being brings nature along with it reaching out beyond necessity.) In fact, though, every individual human being is limited in the degree to which he or she can shape his or her own reality by death and by destiny. Moreover, the species as a whole is limited insofar as it is and remains finite, contingent.

The same holds true for what Tillich calls vertical transcendence (as opposed to the horizontal transcendence of, for example, organic and technological growth). This is spiritual transcendence, which we will cover in later chapters. Here let it suffice to say that in ecstatic union with the divine ground of being it is possible for the human being to transcend its finitude. But again, this transcendence is always partial, always fragmentary. This is a central paradox of our existential condition, that we have both an awareness of our connection to the infinite and the divine, and the basic experience of being ultimately limited, finite, and thus apart from the infinite. This separation is, of
course, named estrangement—and in our estrangement we both transcend our finitude in freedom and remain finite nonetheless.

If to be free means to be a self experiencing itself as a structured whole deliberating, deciding, and taking responsibility for the actualization of its own possibilities . . . what, then, is destiny? As we have seen, it cannot mean that one’s future is somehow determined, for then destiny would not be the polar, reciprocal counterpart to freedom but its negation. But we have already pointed to the meaning of destiny: destiny is “that out of which our decisions arise” and “the concreteness of our being which makes all of our decisions our decisions.” 104 To be free and to have a destiny means to be faced with a world that we did not create, to be a self that we did not cause to be, and at the same time to be responsible for the world and for ourselves. My destiny is thus everything that I am, everything that has shaped me—and that includes every former decision that has shaped who I am today. “It is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself. My destiny is the basis of my freedom; my freedom participates in shaping my destiny.” 105

This is another part of Tillich’s ontological analysis in which we can hear echoes of Martin Heidegger’s existential analytic. The degree to which Tillich’s idea of freedom and destiny echoes Heidegger’s notion of throwness cannot be over-emphasized. In the beginning of Chapter VI of Division One of Being and Time, Heidegger writes: “throwness is the mode of being of a being which always is itself its possibilities in such a way that it understands itself in them and from them (projects itself upon them).” 106 And later, “to being-in-the-world belongs the fact that it,” that is, Da-sein, “is entrusted to itself, that it is always already thrown into a world.” 107 Of course, this sort of “being-
"ahead-of-oneself-in-already-being-in-a-world" is the significance of the term care. And in the significance of the term care we find much of the same language Tillich employs in analyzing freedom and destiny:

The formal existential totality of the ontological structural whole of Da-sein must thus be formulated in the following structure: The being of Da-sein means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings encountered). This being fills in the significance of the term care, which is used in a purely ontological and existential way. . . . In being-ahead-of-oneself, as the being toward one’s ownmost potentiality-of-being, lies the existential and ontological condition of the possibility of being free for authentic existentiell possibilities.¹⁰⁸

Of course, in a very important way, the being of Da-sein is care. This means (to incorporate the Tillichian language as well), that to be the sort of being that can ask the question of being is to be a self (as a centered structural whole) that both faces and belongs to a world (which is a structured unity of manifoldness)—this also means, to be an individual that is what it is through both centeredness and participation.

To be the sort of being that can ask the question of being also means to move and grow through a process of dynamics both creating for itself new forms and conserving the form that makes it the being that it is; and, finally, to be able to move and grow in such a way due to the fact that it is ahead of itself toward its own possibilities in freedom, co-creating its destiny. Each thing that is shares this structure—the ontological elements structure what it is to be at all—but in the human being these elements reach their fullest development, which is why it is the human being that can ask the question of being. By analyzing the human work of projecting one’s own being into one’s own potentiality, the structure of being shows that this being is fundamentally constituted in and through its involvement in the world as a self.
Moreover, since the being of Dasein is defined as care, and temporality is the ontological meaning of care, we can see that in care being brings together past, present, and future in such a way as to shed light on the ideas of freedom and destiny—recalling that for Tillich temporality involves the transitoriness and creativity in everything that is, and is not simply an arranging mechanism of consciousness but a category of both being and knowing. Heidegger’s “being-ahead-of-oneself-in-already-being-in-a-world” involves the future-oriented nature of projection, the past-informed nature of facticity (that one is what one is due to the factual conditions that has made one what one is, from history and culture to genetics and evolution), and the present state of being-in-the-world and alongside other beings within the world. In the experience of freedom as Tillich describes it we find precisely this temporal structure of care as the sort of being that human beings are. In deliberation we are ahead of ourselves, projecting ourselves into possibility; in decision we take responsibility in the present for what we will be in the future, informed by the spectrum of possibilities determined by our past; and in responsibility we bring together past, present and future, experiencing ourselves presently as given to ourselves, formed by past decisions and past and present context, and simultaneously forming our own futures in a continuous process of co-creation. Hence in the experience of freedom we find the truth of destiny, not as necessity but as the actualizing of possibility.

As we have noted in passing in the preceding paragraphs, for Tillich freedom and destiny are unique to the human being, as are self and world—as non-human beings do not find themselves to be centered, structured wholes, they do not find their environment to be a structured unity of manifoldness, though the environment to which they are
connected ultimately is such a unity. Human being, as the being that can and does ask the question of being, can and does find other things to be structured, centered wholes in a world that is a structured unity of manifoldness—that is, the world is as we find it to be, ontologically, as are things, but only we fully have self and world, existentially, through the fully realized subject-object structure of human cognition. Just so, while all beings are individuals participating in their environments, and are dynamically growing forms, all beings spontaneously act as guided by natural laws—this is the non-human structure of freedom and destiny.

Freedom and destiny in the sense of conscious deliberation, decision, and responsibility are unique to the human being—freedom and destiny, as such, are both the “outstanding example” and “cognitive entrance” to the “polarity of spontaneity and law” in the nonhuman realm. Spontaneous acts, Tillich holds, come from “the centered and self-related whole of a being”; law “determines the spontaneous reactions.” Spontaneity and law are thus as related as freedom and destiny: “The laws of nature are laws for self-centered units with spontaneous reactions.” As in quantum physics, “calculation deals with chance, not with determined mechanisms.” This structural basis of all existence underpins all experienced freedom, and thus, “The polarity of freedom and destiny is valid for everything that is.”109 That is, freedom is assigned to all being insofar as it displays the will to power (or the power of being).

* Here it could be observed that transcendental freedom is assigned to all being in the form of spontaneity, while practical freedom is unique to human beings. According to Kant, there are two kinds of freedom. Transcendental freedom means absolute spontaneity—ships and animals have it in spontaneously going this way or that. Practical freedom means ethical decision-making, which is what is being described here. Thus, Tillich’s account of freedom and spontaneity should perhaps be supplemented by Kant’s account, though his distinction between spontaneity and freedom as such may well reiterate Kant’s distinction.
Hence we have seen that all of existence is structured according to the fundamental ontological elemental polarities of individualization and participation, dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny. All of these come together—and indeed, co-determine each other—to constitute the basic ontological structure of self and world. Moreover, since the self-world structure is discovered through an analysis of the subject-object structure of experience, each of these ontological elements manifests more completely in the being capable of cognitively finding these structures within experience.

In looking to freedom and destiny, then, we saw that in freedom being transcends necessity without destroying it—in freedom and destiny existence becomes fully existence, finite being manifesting through the structure of being the self-realization of being-itself. And in existence being finds being as finite being through the categories of being and knowing. Thus we now turn to the conditions of existence (as finite being) and to the categories of being and knowing.

The Conditions of Existence and the Ontological Categories

In this section we follow Tillich in discussing both the conditions of existence and the categories of being and knowing under a single heading. For Tillich, that heading is “Being and Finitude.” Here growth and change—life—originate not only out of the essential self-transcendence of the divine life, but more directly out of the individual dynamism and freedom of existence made possible by the participation of the divine life in finite being, in which being and nonbeing are mixed. This is a point that we have considered at some length, and as we continue we will return to this fundamental ontological dialectic. This will be especially relevant as we consider dual participation.
and the nature of life as such in the next chapter. Here we need simply note that to be *something* is to be limited, to *not be* something else; to be is to be finite. Limitation and separation as a constitutional element in one’s own being is the condition for asking the ontological question at all: the human being “must be separated from his being in a way which enables him to look at it as something strange and questionable. And such separation is actual because man participates not only in being but also in nonbeing.”

Further, as we have repeatedly noted, it is because human being is the being that asks the question of being that the structure of being can be approached through an analysis of human being. Thus, the ontological analysis of the conditions of existence and the categories of being and knowing must begin with an analysis of finitude, marked by the sort of existential separation that allows human being to ask the question of being at all.

―Being, limited by nonbeing, is finitude.‖ Existence is thus the mixture of being and nonbeing. This has already been detailed. Hence, everything that *is*, everything that *exists*, is finite, limited by nonbeing; finitude is a mark of “everything except being-itself—which is not a *thing*.” Thus, the limitation of being implied in finitude is not simply a matter of relative nonbeing: absolute nonbeing manifests itself as relative nonbeing in the structure of being as the *nihil* of “not *yet*” and “no *more*.” Existence simply is “being in process of coming from and going toward nonbeing.”

Moreover, the basic ontological structure and the ontological elements imply finitude: “Selfhood, individuality, dynamics, and freedom, all include manifoldness, definiteness, differentiation, and limitation.” This is what it means to name finitude an ontological condition of existence—the very structure of being necessarily brings nonbeing into
being as the transcendental condition of the actuality of anything at all, and this structural necessity is experienced directly in the anxiety over death and the ontological shock.

We saw above that it is the structural unity of self and world that allows the self to grasp and shape the world through reason, for through reason the centered whole that is the self grasps the *logos* that schematizes or shapes the structured manifold of unity that is the world. Human being grasps and shapes reality in the self-transcendence constituted by the elemental polarity of dynamics and form—this can only be possible because self and world polarize a primordial unity, as Heidegger shows in his essay “On the Essence of Truth.” Further, self-transcendence as such is possible because human being manifests the structure of being *in and as* a self in a world—this is the most fully realized participation of the divine life in existence.

Thus, the categories by which human being knows (that is, grasps) being are themselves ontological, they are present in everything, and the mind as a structure of being “is not able to experience reality except through the categorical forms.”¹¹⁵ That is, the mind does not somehow invent the categorical forms of experience as experienced, nor does it create the phenomenal form of the world through the imposition of these forms, as some interpretations of Kant might suggest. Rather, the forms of being and knowing are the means by which consciousness directly grasps and shapes the structure of being—and, again, this is possible because self and world, subject and object, are polarizations of a primordial, essential unity of being. The categories are therefore the “forms of finitude” and the ways in which the structure of being constituting existence is experienced. The categories that Tillich discusses as theologically significant are time,
space, causality, and substance—as forms of finitude each of these categories unites “an affirmative and negative element.”

Time, according to Tillich, is the “central category of finitude.” As we saw above, temporality understood as transitoriness and creativity is a key feature of all existence, and thus is integral to both self and world, as well as to all of the elements that constitute the structure of being. With this we also see both the negative and positive aspects of time. Negatively, time is understood through transitoriness, the “impossibility of fixing the present moment” between not-yet and no-more, “within a flux of time which never stands still.” Positively, the self-transcendence characteristic of the divine life and finite life in general, symbolized as the will to power, depends upon “the creative character of the temporal process.” Thus, in human existence, the positive and negative aspects of time are experienced such that “in immediate self-awareness, time unites the anxiety of transitoriness with the courage of a self-affirming present.”

Further, in this union we see that time as temporality is experienced as united with presence—as in, being-here in the present. One moves in the present between past and future, but one is also always present somewhere, in the present one has presence, which one no longer has in the past and does not yet have in the future. Accordingly, space and time are fundamentally joined in human being:

The present implies space. Time creates the present through its union with space. . . To be means to have space. Every being strives to provide and preserve space for itself. This means above all a physical location—the body, a piece of soil, a home, a city, a country, the world. It also means a social ‘space’—a vocation, a sphere of influence, a group, a historical period, a place in remembrance and anticipation, a place within a structure of values and meanings. Not to have space is not to be.
To have a place is the positive experience of space, but one is also always anxious of losing it. Hence, anxiety announces nonbeing not only in the ontological shock and the anxiety over death—though this is the ultimate loss of place—but also in anxiety over loss of security, represented in the nihilation of space understood as place.

The third category Tillich discusses, causality, is experienced in tandem with thowness, as we saw above—not only are we responsible for our potentialities, but we are thrown into them as caused, contingent, finite, and not as self-caused and self-sustaining. The causes of our being may have been different, yet we are simultaneously responsible for that being. This is the elemental polarity of freedom and destiny, and it represents the self-aware and creative entrance of the self as causal agent into the causal chain of which it is a part. Here “causal agency” means the ability to initiate a causal series spontaneously—the human being can do this, but only as a self within a world. Thus, the human being is both a causal agent and subject to the causal series of which it is a part. Negatively, causality expresses “the inability of anything to rest on itself”—that is, the contingency of both self and world. In courage, however—or, in Heideggerian language, in authentically and resolutely taking responsibility for one’s being—one is able to rest in oneself as the co-author of one’s destiny while yet accepting contingency.120

Finally, according to Tillich, substance stands in contrast to causality—yet again the two are united, as were space and time. Where causality points to contingency and transition, substance points to the ontological factor of permanence within change. “In contrast to causality, substance points to something underlying the flux of appearances, something which is relatively self-contained.” Yet one should be careful not to make the
metaphysical mistake of seeking to articulate the attributes of substance apart from the flux of appearances, as Tillich makes quite clear: “the substance is nothing beyond the accidents in which it expresses itself. So in both substance and accidents the positive element is balanced by the negative element.” In other words, substance points to that aspect of reality that makes change possible by remaining stable and relatively changeless—but still, everything changes, and thus all change “reveals the relative nonbeing of that which changes.” Hence Tillich successfully avoids metaphysical speculation about what substance “is” by simply noting that for experience of change to be possible “substance as a category” must be ingredient “in any encounter of mind and reality.”121 Meanwhile, since everything that is is finite and therefore transitory, there is no thing that is substance apart from the accidents in which it is presented just as there is no dynamics apart from form.

As such, in his discussion of the categories Tillich points to a transcendental analysis of the conditions for the possibility of being to be revealed in experience. He does so without either hypostatizing space, time, causality, or substance, on the one hand, or making the categories of being and knowing merely organizing schemata of the mind as do some versions of idealism, on the other. Rather, pointing to the primordial unity of self and world, subject and object, in the ground of being, Tillich can connect the subjective reason of cognition with the objective reason that he calls the logos of being such that both constitute and configure each other. This is necessarily the case, further, due to the fact that structured being is grounded in the primordial unity of being-itself, structured in elemental polarity, and manifests through dialectical process as the structured unity of manifoldness, both in self and in world.
The categories are ways in which reason grasps being, and thus each can be connected to the experience of the elements of the ontological structure. For instance, in the experience of time we saw the deep connection of that experience to the dynamics of freedom and destiny, so that in freedom time is made manifest through deliberation, decision, and responsibility. Just so, in causality the free self enters the structure of transitoriness structured by the process of self-transcendence structured by dynamics and form, whereas substance points to the experience of being sustaining form even while it creates new form. Furthermore, the ontological recognition that there is no metaphysical substance apart from the accidents in which it expresses itself may well express the deeper point that being-itself cannot be known apart from its self-manifestation in structured being. Hence we turn to the final subject of this first chapter, the depth dimension of being expressed in Tillich’s notion of the ground and abyss of being.

**The Ground and Abyss of Being**

According to Tillich, the task of theological ontology is “to contemplate and describe reality in such a way that its supporting ground becomes transparent through it.” ¹²² Hence we began with a consideration of being-itself, the power of being, and nonbeing, and saw that the dialectical process of the self-manifestation of being-itself in and through the divine life is concretized in structured being. We then examined that structure as well as the way that such examination is possible because human being can grasp the structure of being due to the fact that both self and world are grounded in the primordial unity grounding them. Yet...
On the one hand we found in the examination of the structure of being the key to the meaning of an important Heideggerian claim:

Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing.

Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This being we call “transcendence.” If in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never be related to beings nor even to itself.

Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom. . . . The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such. In the Being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs.  

In the above quote a number of our thematic terms appear—nothing (i.e., nonbeing), transcendence, self, freedom—and we can easily interpret this passage through Tillich’s ontological development, which itself owes a structural debt to Heidegger’s existential analytic. Moreover, the somewhat confusing locutions such as “unfolding” of beings and “nihilation of the nothing” can be read in terms of the power of being dialectically resisting nonbeing in the very process of the divine life.

On the other hand, we also found that since everything that is (or has being) is necessarily structured—hence limited by nonbeing, hence finite—when reason seeks the ground of the structure of being it experiences that ground to be an abyss. Again, this is the meaning of Heidegger’s statement, “it remains an open question whether the ground is a truly grounding, foundation effecting, originary ground,” or “whether the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss.”  

This discovery, ingredient to the question of being as such, points clearly to the boundary situation of the limit of reason when reason asks seriously the ontological question, “Why is there something; why not nothing?” just as when reason asks seriously the theological question, which, in the end, comes down to the ontological question.
In the beginning of this chapter we cited Tillich’s familiar claim that the only non-symbolic statement about God is that God is being-itself. Yet if being-itself is revealed through the ontological search to be both ground and abyss, then this statement itself reveals the abyss in its lack of content—indeed, in the impossibility of providing content to this statement, since everything that reason can grasp is structured, and since the ground of being is beyond the grasp of reason, an abyss. Hence even with that seemingly basic, non-symbolic statement we are thrown back upon symbolism—here again the question surfaces “whether there is a point at which a non-symbolic assertion about God must be made.” Tillich answers, “There is such a point, namely, the statement that everything we say about God is symbolic.”126 This is not a contradiction of the earlier “only” non-symbolic statement about God but the meaning of it—the ground of the structure of being is found through existential and ontological analysis to be abyss by the very being questioning being.

The ontological question is the first in rank and the broadest in scope.127 It is that question which brings reason face to face with itself—and for Tillich the ontological and theological questions are finally the same question—and it brings reason to its final limit. Tillich makes this point clear when he writes:

If we say that God is the infinite, or the unconditional, or being-itself, we speak rationally and ecstatically at the same time. These terms precisely designate the boundary line at which both the symbolic and the non-symbolic coincide. Up to this point every statement is non-symbolic (in the sense of religious symbol). Beyond this point every statement is symbolic (in the sense of religious symbol). The point itself is both non-symbolic and symbolic. This dialectical situation is the conceptual expression of man’s existential situation. It is the condition for man’s religious existence and for his ability to receive revelation. It is another side of the self-transcendent or ecstatic idea of God, beyond naturalism and supranaturalism.128
We have, of course, seen this dialectic between concept and symbol repeatedly in our own analysis of Tillich’s ontology, in our language of self-manifestation and in our guiding symbol, the divine life (the subject of the next chapter).

The terms ground and abyss, furthermore, are highly dialectical. As Thatcher notes, “Ground and abyss are dialectically related to one another, and in constant interplay between one another. This dialectical relation mirrors the parallel dialectical relation in God, i.e., between being and non-being.” We made much of this second dialectic in the first section of this chapter, in which we held that the play between the power of being and nonbeing, both grounded in being-itself, allowed for the dynamic process of the divine life as the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being. More to our current purpose, though, is the point that the ground of being is revealed as an abyss to reason in the very search for the ground of that self-manifestation. Therefore, the ecstatic experience of the divine “unites the experience of the abyss to which reason in all its functions is driven with the experience of the ground in which reason is grasped by the mystery of its own depth of being generally.” Hence, in God as being-itself, “the ground is not only an abyss in which every form disappears; it is also the source from which every form emerges. The ground of being has the character of self-manifestation.”

The important point that in searching for the ground of being reason finds an abyss, pointing to the cognitive boundary situation where symbolic and non-symbolic language coincide, brings us directly to the depth dimension of theological thought. From this depth, that which is beyond all reason (God, Anselm’s “that than which none greater can be conceived”) breaks into cognition, and does so most immediately in being
asking the question of being. This depth dimension is directly relevant to theological thought, for, as Robert P. Scharlemann points out, “Religious assertions are symbolic (referring to the depth of being), ontological assertions are literal (referring to the structure of being), and theological assertions are literal descriptions of the correlation between the religious symbols and the ontological concepts.”

Hence, in this opening chapter focusing on the grounding ontology we have repeatedly had recourse to symbolic language. This signifies directly the inescapable nature of the depth breaking into cognition in the very asking of the ontological question—these terms are necessary at times, since theological work inherently operates at this boundary, and they necessarily must “not attempt to define the indefinable, but point beyond themselves to the inscrutable depth which God is.”

We have taken pains to keep this admonition always in mind. Moreover, throughout this chapter, beginning with being-itself we moved into the dialectic of God’s self-manifestation in structured being—or ontology proper—never leaving behind that depth. This is only fitting, for we repeatedly had reason to reference the primordial, grounding unity of the structural elements as well as the resulting unity of the elemental polarities coming together.

Tillich himself models this approach, expressly looking to the structure of being to seek its depth. As David E. Klemm and William H. Klink articulate, it is precisely through such an examination that theological depth is to be found:

By depth we mean the standpoint from which the investigator can see the unity in difference of the structural elements. This standpoint enables one to see how the elements in the structure are necessarily related yet irreducible to each other. The depth of the structure is a presentation of the fundamental principle according to which the basic elements of the structure are seen as both unified and preserved in their difference. In this sense the concept of depth is always implied in the concept of structure: any structure has a depth insofar as the structure is a unified,
coherent structure. The depth of a structure is thus immediately present in the structure itself as ground, basis, and principle.\textsuperscript{134}

Insofar as being is a unified, coherent structural whole—as Tillich no doubt describes it—being-itself as the ground and abyss of being is clearly the depth of the structure of being as Klemm and Klink understand it. As they put the point, in looking to the structure to look for the ground of that structure, and finding there the abyss of reason’s limit, God \textit{as the mystery of being} appears to reason directly: “God appears (as the depth)” and “the depth element itself enables the thinking of God’s being (as manifest in what is not God).”\textsuperscript{135}

Thus we have discussed in some detail the structure of being as Tillich analyzes it, and described that structure as the self-manifestation of being-itself. In so doing we have come to the limit of reason, where concepts give way to symbols. This is the depth of the structure, where ground appears as abyss. We have suggested that the proper symbolic term for the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being—fundamentally enabled by the dialectic of the power of being eternally overcoming nonbeing—is the “divine life.” Here religious, symbolic language expresses the dual participation of the divine in being and beings in the divine. It is the power of being resisting nonbeing (both of which are grounded in being-itself) that enables everything that is to be—to have the power to come from and hold itself out into the nothing. In this dynamic, beings reciprocally participate in being-itself as particular instances of its self-manifestation, concretely actualizing the self-transcendence of being-itself. This dual participation, again, speaks to the depth of being in wonder, mystery, and power just as it speaks to the sacredness of beings and of nature herself, as this dissertation seeks to show. Hence, we now turn to our discussion of the nature of life as such, our
understanding of the divine life in more detail—for finite life is necessarily a
manifestation of the dynamic process that is the divine life—and to the function of the
guiding symbol, divine life.
Notes


5. Paul Tillich, 1:244.


10. This is Professor Klemm’s favorite example, and I am indebted to him for my ability to rehearse it on command.

11. For the difficulties surrounding this line of thought, see especially Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 99.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., §5.


24. Ibid., 1.73.

25. Ibid., 1.75-76.

26. Ibid., 1.82.

27. Ibid., 1.94.

28. Ibid., 1.78-79.

29. Ibid., 1.80.

30. Ibid., 1:62.


32. Ibid., 34.


36. Ibid., 97-98.


41. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 100-01.


44. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.


47. Ibid., 24.

48. Ibid., 25.

49. Ibid., 179-80.


54. Ibid., 40.

55. Ibid., 41.


57. Ibid., 164.

58. Ibid., 238.


64. Ibid., 1:169.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., 1:170.

69. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §69.c.


72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 1:171.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 1:172.

77. Ibid., 1:174.

78. Ibid., 1:165.

79. Ibid., 1:175.

80. Ibid.


83. Ibid., 1:178.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., 1:179.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 1:180.

88. Ibid., 1:181.
89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., 1:182.

92. Ibid.

93. Michael Rohlf, “Immanuel Kant.”


96. Michael Rohlf, “Immanuel Kant.”


98. Ibid., 1:182-83.

99. Ibid., 1:183.

100. Ibid., 1:184.

101. Ibid., 1:176.

102. Ibid., 1:180.

103. Ibid., 2:25, 3:140, 3:282.

104. Ibid., 1:184.

105. Ibid., 1:185.


107. Ibid., §41.

108. Ibid.


110. Ibid., 1:186.

111. Ibid., 1:187.
112. Ibid., 1:189.


114. Ibid., 1:189-90.

115. Ibid., 1:192.

116. Ibid., 1:192-93.

117. Ibid., 1:193.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 1:194.

120. Ibid., 1:197.

121. Ibid.


125. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:163, for this discussion.


129. Adrian Thatcher, *Ontology*, 57.


131. Ibid., 1:158.


135. Ibid., 518.
CHAPTER II:
The Divine Life as Symbol

If we use the symbol “divine life,” as we certainly must, we imply that there is an analogy between the basic structure of experienced life and the ground of being in which life is rooted. This analogy leads to the recognition of three elements which appear in different ways and which are the basis for the trinitarian interpretation of the final revelation.

The divine life is the dynamic unity of depth and form. In mystical language the depth of the divine life, its inexhaustible and ineffable character, is called “Abyss.” In philosophical language the form, the meaning and structure element of the divine life, is called “logos.” In religious language the dynamic unity of both elements is called “Spirit.”

Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume One

The Divine Life in Existential Questioning

Through the course of Chapter I we considered the ontological question and its answer through existential analysis. Through that analysis we had reason to repeatedly return to the symbol of the divine life, a symbol that will be given content in the present chapter. We saw that the search for being begins in ontological shock, and that it finds in its search for the ground of being an abyss. It is for this reason that the ontological and theological question is neither simply a logical question nor an ontic question—it is not a question concerning the logical necessity of finite thought, though the logical necessity driving the question holds a clue to its paradoxical answer, nor is it a question that can be answered in the same way that we answer questions about beings in the world. Rather, the theological and ontological question is an existential question. Neither Heidegger nor Tillich articulates an ordinary question; they articulate the question of being and not-being, a question that, to be truly asked, must concern a person totally, existentially.

“Tillich means by ‘existential’ ‘participation in a situation … with the whole of one’s existence’” Thatcher points out. “For Heidegger, the existential question is a
question about the meaning of the being of Dasein.”¹ Yet since the question of the meaning of the being of Dasein is a question that Dasein asks as a mode of its being, Dasein is wholly involved in it. Thus, for Tillich, the theological and ontological questions are the same question asked from different directions.² In either sense, the theological, ontological question is existential: we participate in our entire being in the situation of the power of being overcoming nonbeing, and the question of being as such goes to the root of the human situation.

As a logical question, however—as a question asked by reason and thus bound to the structure of reason—the ontological question is literally unanswerable. There is nothing within our experience that can causally, scientifically, rationally answer the question of the ultimate source of our being. We must simply respond to the fact of our being and to being as such—and in this response an answer to the question is paradoxically found. Robert P. Scharlemann draws out this dynamic brilliantly in his *Reflection and Doubt*, and it is worth quoting him at some length on this point:

“We are concerned here with two activities, reflection and response, and the special significance of a paradoxical reality for them. Let us first notice what such a paradox would be in relation to reflection, and then notice what it would be in relation to response. A paradoxical reality for critical reflection would be something objectival which I can only understand by thinking my act of reflection—that is to say, the very endeavor and failure of this undertaking is itself the way of critically reflecting a paradoxical reality. . . . In the case of all other objectival realities, I understand them objectively by critically reflecting them. In the case of a paradoxical reality, I understand it only by trying to “catch” my act of critically reflecting.”³

Of course I can never catch my act of critically reflecting because reflection is a temporal act, and “once I take into account this temporality, I am conscious that each act, each here-and-now, is new. And if each here-and-now act is a new reflection, I can never ‘catch’ it, I can never think my present act because it is always gone when I think it.”⁴
The objectival that I can only understand by thinking my act of reflection, furthermore, is the meaning of being—it is for this reason that it must be asked through the existential entrance to the hermeneutical circle. Hence in endeavoring to find the ground of being—to answer the ontological question, “Why is there something; why not nothing?”—and failing, I enter the question through the experience of the ontological shock and find the ground of being to be abyss.

Turning to paradoxical presence—the presence of the power of being in all being, which I encounter only through the encounter with beings and never in and of itself—Scharlemann continues: “A parallel state of affairs exists with regard to a paradoxical presence, which is a presence, or power, to which I am responding when I try to “catch” my here-and-now act of response. . . . In the case of other presences, my response is made directly to them; in the case of a paradoxical presence, I respond by relating to my act of responding.” My response to the presence of the power of being is symbolic—I say, “God”—and in responding to God I respond to my response, through which the power of God is paradoxically present, for it is the nature of a symbol to participate in that which it discloses, while not itself being that to which it points. (We will discuss the nature of symbols in more depth below.) “Being is given as a self-negating being, a paradox; and God is present for response as a self-removing presence, a paradox. . . . They are an objectival presentation of my subjectivity in its temporality, the manifestation of God and being to temporal being.”5 The fact that both ontological reflection and religious response point to the same paradoxical dynamic is, of course, the meaning of the method of correlation. This is the force of the self-correcting nature of the method, and the source of its success. Furthermore, Scharlemann’s comments bring us face to face with
that to which we respond when we respond to the power of being manifest in all beings: the divine life.

As a religious response the divine life is a symbol of that to which we are responding, and it is the purpose of this chapter to draw out the theological and ontological content of that symbol. Let us briefly, then, recall what was said about the divine life in the previous chapter. First and foremost, it must always be remembered that “divine life” is a symbol. As we will see below, “God lives in so far as he is the ground of life”—the symbol partakes in that which it symbolizes and thus, “We must speak of God as living in symbolic terms.” The symbol of the divine life, furthermore, was shown to refer to the active interplay of the structural elements of being in as much as that interplay constitutes the self-manifestation of being-itself. Being-itself, as primordial unity, is manifest in the structure of being. For this reason Tillich can say that God is being-itself and is the structure of being, while not subject to the structure of being.

As such, the divine life points to the ontological dialectical and dynamical separation, tension, and union of the structural elements of being making possible the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being, which involves nonbeing as an active ontological principle. Thus, ontologically considered, correlate to the symbol “divine life” is the dynamic structure of the self-manifestation of being-itself by which being-itself unites the power of being and its overcoming of nonbeing in the dynamic interplay constitutive of self-transcendence. That is, the divine life is the symbolic correlate to the ontological claim that the active dialectic of the power of being eternally overcoming nonbeing constitutes the self-manifestation and self-transcendence of being-
itself in structured being. This re-unification through separation is thus the third term in the power-of-being/nonbeing dialectic. Therefore, growth and change—finite life—is made possible because structured being is the self-transcendence of being-itself, and, as such, the divine life can be said to be the participation of being-itself in the finite.

All of this needs to be further detailed—and, in the case of the last point, to be established in the first place—and that is the task of the remainder of this chapter. We will thus first consider Tillich’s doctrine of the infinite and the finite; this will provide us with some conceptual grounding to consider the participation of God in creation in later sections of the chapter. Before moving into that, though, we will need to further detail the idea of the divine life. To do that we will, first, consider the ontological structure of life as such, and then relate that to Tillich’s understanding of God as a living God. From there we will be able to more directly define the idea of “dual participation”—through which God participates in creation and creatures participate in the divine life—and, finally, the symbolic function of the idea of the divine life.

**The Infinite and the Finite**

We saw in Chapter I that, according to Tillich’s ontology, anything that *is*, is in so far as it is given to be by the power of being. We also saw that every *thing* that is, is finite—a mixture of being and nonbeing, or the product of the power of being overcoming nonbeing. Hence, Tillich writes, “Being, limited by nonbeing, is finitude. . . . this is true of everything except being-itself, which is not a ‘thing.’” This is by now quite familiar to us. Here, though, we need to go further, for Tillich continues, “everything which participates in the power of being is ‘mixed’ with nonbeing. It is
Moreover, Tillich holds, it is because human beings are finite—because they are always being in process of going to and coming from nonbeing—that they have an awareness of the infinite: “In order to experience his finitude, man must look at himself from the point of a potential infinity. In order to be aware of moving toward death, man must look out over his finite being as a whole; he must in some way be beyond it. . . . All the structures of finitude force finite being to transcend itself and, just for this reason, to become aware of itself as finite.” How does this work? What is the infinite and what is the relationship between the infinite and the finite, such that finitude recognizes itself by being forced into awareness of the infinite, and vice versa?

Since the self-manifestation of being-itself is effected by being-itself taking nonbeing into itself in eternal overcoming, finitude is necessarily a mark of that manifestation in creation. (We will discuss the symbol of creation below.) The infinite is not the same as being-itself—being-itself is the ground of being, the depth of the structure of being, the primordial unity incorporating and transcending the polar structures that being-itself at the same time is, through its self-manifestation. Being-itself unites the power of being and its overcoming of nonbeing in the divine life. This is what Tillich means by being-itself; and he defines infinitude as follows: “Infinitude is finitude transcending itself without any a priori limit.”

Of course, any particular thing has its limits. Death, destruction, lack, restrictions—even the limiting function of relative nonbeing, by which a thing is what it is and not another thing, with the capabilities proper only to the type of thing that it is—all of this is due to the ontological fact that being is necessarily a mixture of the power of
being and nonbeing. Yet the processes by which the finite as such transcends itself—birth, evolution, imagination—these are unlimited \textit{a priori}. How far into the future can a species continue itself through birth? This may be limited by environmental factors, predation, or, in the case of the human species especially, self-destructive behavior… but there does not seem to be an \textit{a priori} limit to birth as such. Just so, into what new forms can a species evolve, given time and resources enough? How far can the human imagination extend, given time and resources enough? It is precisely in recognizing the infinite capability for the self-transcendence of life that the individual recognizes its own finitude. Where being-itself transcends itself in the unlimited self-transecndence of life, being-itself can truly be said to be infinite. Hence, the divine life is infinite—but the infinite and being itself are not the same thing in terms of ontological, conceptual analysis. “Being-itself is not infinity; it is that which lies beyond the polarity of finitude and infinite self-transcendence,” Tillich writes, for we must remember that infinitude is \textit{finitude transcending itself} without any \textit{a priori} limit. “Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself.”\textsuperscript{11}

Here, then, is an interesting point: being-itself manifests itself \textit{in and through} structured being—hence, in the being of particular beings—and also \textit{to} finite being in the drive of the finite beyond itself. Here again we are reminded of our discussion of Nietzsche’s “will to power,” in which it was recognized that the power of being, symbolized as will to power, is the will to the self-overcoming of life in and through itself, in “overflow, growth, expansion”\textsuperscript{12}… or, as Tillich puts it, “the self affirmation of life in its self-transcending dynamics.”\textsuperscript{13} This will is infinite, and it is because the human
being can look to that infinite self-transcendence that it becomes aware of its finitude not only logically but existentially, in anxiety.

Therefore, the relation of the infinite to the finite is not one of negation but of transcendence and participation. That is, it is not the case that the infinite is marked by the negation of the finite—that would imply negation and limitation even of the infinite, Hegel’s *schlechte Unendlichkeit*, “bad infinity.” Interestingly, the English form of the word sheds light on the term in two directions, one of which is consistent with Tillich’s usage. “Infinite” clearly combines the concept of the finite with the prefix, “in-”. When “in-” is used as a negation—“not, without,” as in “infertile, insane”—the negation does indeed give us the bad infinite. There is another way to use the prefix, however—as meaning “into, towards, or inside,” as in “influx, input, or intend.” In that case, we can correctly express Tillich’s use of the term infinite, the idea that God lives in and through the finite, and being-itself manifests itself in, through, and to the finite as the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself.

Therefore, Tillich writes, “that which is infinite would not be infinite if it were limited by the finite. God is infinite because he has the finite (and with it that embodiment of nonbeing which belongs to finitude) within himself united with his infinity. One of the functions of the symbol ‘divine life’ is to point to this situation.”

Moreover, and this will be extremely important to our upcoming discussions, “The infinite is present in everything finite, in the stone as well as in the genius.” This follows, of course, because the self-manifestation of being-itself is in structured being as such, and thus any structured being will participate in that self-manifestation, just as the self-manifestation is effected in and through each finite being as well as being-as-a-
whole. We will unpack the idea of the divine life and its dual participation before the close of this chapter. To fully understand divine life as symbol, though, we need to understand Tillich’s doctrine of the ontological structure of life as such, and it is to this that we now turn.

The Ontological Structure of Life

The ontological concept of life, for Tillich, begins in his philosophy concerning the “actuality of being.” Tillich discusses the actuality of being in two related sets of terminology, each playing off and developing the other: on the one hand, he writes in terms of the actualization of potential; on the other, he writes in terms of the transition from essence to existence. Further, Tillich’s idea of life is deeply connected to his conception of the structure of being, which we have been discussing in terms of the self-manifestation of being-itself, or, symbolically, in terms of the divine life. “The actualization of potential is a structural condition of all beings,” he writes. As such, “the universal concept of life is unavoidable. Consequently, the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process.” Clearly this assertion is of serious importance to our discussion of Nature and of Gaia, for our guiding symbol, the divine life, and for the consideration of the panentheist nature of Tillich’s theology in the next chapter.

Before we run too far ahead of ourselves, though, we must ask: What does it mean for the potential to become actual? The answer to this will run throughout any discussion of life, be it the divine life or the finite life grounded in it. To answer that question, moreover, we must begin to understand how that becoming is tied up in
Tillich’s “halfway demythologization” of the Christian doctrine of the Fall. All of these are tied together because, for Tillich, the religious symbol, the Fall, is correlated to the ontological transition from essence to existence, and the transition from essence to existence is the meaning of the actualization of potentiality, which is, again, the ontological concept of life.

Here, too, we should note that the terms essence and existence have a long, storied, and contested history both philosophically and theologically, from Plato and Aristotle, through St. Thomas Aquinas, and into existential philosophy. Their use is often confusing for the rich variety of positions attached to them. Our purpose here, of course, is not to trace the meaning of those terms throughout intellectual history—not only is that far beyond the scope of the current discussion but in fact it is unnecessary. While we have already noted Thatcher’s critique of Tillich’s “philosophical eclecticism,” in fact Tillich does use these terms in a way specific to his own system, and while we should recall the history of their use Tillich is not limited to that history, though he clearly comes out of it and draws upon it.

In any case, for Tillich the doctrine of the Fall concerns the transition from essence to existence, and the Fall is understood as “a symbol for the human situation universally, not as the story of an event that happened ‘once upon a time.’” The “essential and the existential” are “two main qualifications of being,” and those essences that become actual are said to exist. Hence we have a linkage of two parallel sets of concepts: essence and potentiality, existence and actuality. Tillich writes:

Potentiality is that kind of being which has the power, the dynamic, to become actual (for example, the potentiality of every tree is treehood). There are other essences which do not have this power, such as geometrical forms (for example, the triangle). Those which become actual, however, subject themselves to the
conditions of existence, such as finitude, estrangement, conflict, and so on. This
does not mean that they lose their essential character (trees remain trees) but it
does mean that they fall under the structures of existence and are open to growth,
distortion, and death.\textsuperscript{22}

Again, this quote can be read in a number of ways. For example, is this as Platonic as it
seems, and if so does this commit Tillich to some sort of Platonic dualism? In fact it does
not, though to see why not it is useful to turn to the expositions of Robert P. Scharlemann
and, especially, Donald F. Dreisbach, who gave a lucid, detailed account of this issue in
\textit{The Harvard Theological Review}.

Let us begin here with Scharlemann, whom it is worthwhile to quote at some
length, rather than to paraphrase:

Both essence and existence are abstractions from the actual life situation. The
place where we find ourselves is life, which is a mixture of essential and
existential elements. To speak of essence or existence is to speak of one of the
elements of life but not of life itself. The difference between the two abstractions
is that essence refers to the structure of being and existence refers to the
distortions in that structure. Thus, whereas the mark of the essential structure is
finitude, the mark of existence is estrangement; whereas the polarities in the
structure are essentially in balanced and dynamic tension, in existence they
contradict each other. Instead of a structure of finitude, existence is a structure of
destruction, a structure that works against itself because it is severed from its
ground.\textsuperscript{23}

It is a fundamental condition of existence that, though being-itself manifests itself in,
through, and to finite beings, finite beings themselves are not their own ground, nor do
they perfectly manifest the essential unity and balance of the structure of being through
which being-itself is manifest. The power of finite beings to be is the power of being, the
power of being itself eternally overcoming nonbeing, yet the beings themselves to do not
overcome nonbeing eternally—they are limited and in fact defined by nonbeing. Hence
to exist, as we defined it in the first chapter, is to stand out of nonbeing and potential
being—it is to \textit{become} actual. That becoming is an ongoing process—\textit{life} is always
process—coming from and going into nonbeing. To actually realize potentialities is what it means to come from and go towards nonbeing, and thus existence as actual is never simply static.

In the existential analysis we begin from the lived situation and investigate being from there. Hence Scharlemann’s point that essence and existence are abstractions. On the other hand, Tillich gives both essence and existence ontological status. Here Scharlemann’s discussion of abstractions remains especially abstract, and though Dreisbach’s analysis may not agree with Scharlemann’s in all its particulars, he does offer us a more accessible way into Tillich’s distinction between essence and existence, the connection to potentiality and actuality, and the symbol of the Fall.

To begin with, however, let us cite the definitions Tillich offers us, the same definitions cited by Dreisbach in the beginning of his essay. Existence is less difficult to define (though perhaps not less difficult to comprehend, especially when paired with the concept of essence)—existence is defined just as we put it in Chapter I, denoting “the possibility of finding a thing within the whole of being” and, ontologically, “the actuality of that which is potential.”

Essence can mean the nature of a thing without any valuation of it, it can mean the universals which characterize a thing, it can mean the ideas in which existing things participate, it can mean the norm by which a thing must be judged, it can mean the original goodness of everything created, and it can mean the patterns of all things in the divine mind. The basic ambiguity, however, lies in the oscillation of the meaning between an empirical and valuating sense. Essence as the nature of a thing, or as the quality in which a thing participates, has one character. Essence as that from which being has "fallen," the true and undistorted nature of things, has another character. In the second case essence is the basis of value judgments, while in the first case essence is a logical ideal to be reached by abstraction of intuition without the interference of valuations.
Hence we have a number of elements to the definition, divided along the lines of a basic ambiguity. On the one hand, essence means the nature of a thing, the universal concept it instantiates—this is a logical ideal (for example, the “treehood” by which we recognize particular oaks, pines, and elms as all trees). This sense of essence is value neutral. We simply say, “This is a tree,” or “This is not a tree”—there is no sense in which we pass moral judgment on the stalk of wheat because it does not live up to the ideal of treehood, nor do we claim that a tree is intrinsically more valuable than the wheat. They simply are what they are. On the other hand, in the symbol of the Fall, essence makes value judgments possible. We compare the thing as it is to the thing in its full potentiality, and in that way judge it as more or less ideal. This stalk of wheat produces inedible grain, and thus is not as good as that which produces edible grain. Neither sense contradicts the other, though it is valuable to understand the distinction.

Hence, Tillich understands essence “as the realm of potentiality, and existence as the actualization of or standing out from this potentiality.” Of course, this distinction does not signal a “complete break”—hence Scharlemann’s point that both are abstractions from the situation of life—especially since, for Tillich “our knowledge of a what a thing is, of its essence, is primarily knowledge of what a thing can be, its potentialities, and how well something fulfills its potentialities is the basis of the evaluation of the thing.” Again we are reminded that the evaluation of a thing is entirely a matter of comparing the logical ideal of what the thing is and could be to the thing’s actual instantiation of those potentialities. The knowledge of what a thing is and could be is conceptual and applied to particular entities in accordance with the
understanding of being as the connection of a concept (universal) and a percep
t(partial).  

Thus the concept expressing the essence of a thing is bound up in an awareness of the specific set of potentialities the thing does and could actualize. This, Dreisbach notes, applies both to species and to individuals:

This is confusing, and Tillich’s attempt to work out the relation of these two essences is not very successful. But while it may be ambiguous to use the same term to designate both realities, I do have a human nature and human potentialities, as well as my own nature and my own, unique potentialities, and I reproach myself for failing to actualize both kinds. Furthermore, it is not always easy to differentiate the two kinds of potentialities. I have, for example, the potentiality to be a better friend. To what extent is this a potentiality I share with all men and to what extent is it an aspect of my unique life and situation?  

Dreisbach continues this line of thought, connecting conceptual ideals with value judgments, to connect the actualization of potentiality to the idea of sin that is the concern of the symbol of the Fall.

Recalling that the Fall symbolizes the universal, ongoing transition from essence to existence, understood in terms of potentiality and actualization, Dreisbach notes that “potentialities are never completely actualized.” Again, this works on both the level of the species and of the individual. First, human beings have certain potentialities that can be more or less fully realized—for example, the ability to love—which we can never realize as completely as possible. Second, “I am continually grasping and actualizing some of my possibilities. In doing so, I am at the same time rejecting other possibilities that are equally mine. If I commit myself to something, no matter how good that thing is in itself, I reject other goods.” Finally, even having chosen one good over another, I do not realize that good as fully as it could possibly be realized. In each case, this is in part a matter of decisions, in part a matter of weakness, or fallibility. In any case, this is
characteristic of existence as such—as particular actualizations of ideal essences, actualizations of potentialities always imply distortion. “What becomes actual is always an incomplete manifestation of essential possibilities.” In human existence, moreover, this distortion is always tied to choice. Tillich views sin in terms of the fact that the human being is always already responsible for what he or she is and becomes—this is what Tillich points to when he interprets the Fall in terms of the transition from essence to existence.

Still, and contrary to the Platonic dualism Christianity inherited through Plotinus and St. Augustine of Hippo, while essences do have ontological standing, existence is more real. Hence Dreisbach summarizes his argument as follows:

Here essences are described as structures, powers of being, by implication closely related to God (God is the power of being) and they are necessary conditions for anything to be. But these structures are not existing entities. . . . An essence, a potentiality or, perhaps better, a cluster of potentialities, is not nothing. It is real, but only in a very limited way. But, and here Tillich sides with Aristotle against Plato, it is the existing particular that is the highest manifestation of being. . . . My essence is a cluster of possibilities, possibilities that belong to me because I am a man and because I am the particular man that I am. These possibilities are real, and therefore have some ontological status, which Tillich calls potential being, a limited, unactualized level of being. The act of existing, of taking on actual being, is the actualization of potentialities. But in this process of actualization potentialities are rejected, and those that are actualized are not perfectly realized. . . . So to be, and especially to be a human being, is to be in a continual tension between essence and existence, between what is and what could be.

It is due to this tension that human beings face their existence in anxiety, and affirm their being only with courage.

Yet for Tillich existence is the fulfillment of creation… limited, imperfect, and fallen as it is. This is so because “being a creature means both to be rooted in the creative ground of the divine life and to actualize one’s self through freedom. Creation is fulfilled in the creaturely self-realization which simultaneously is freedom and destiny. But it is
fulfilled through separation from the creative ground through a break between existence and essence. Creaturely freedom is the point at which creation and the fall coincide.”

We, as creatures, actualize our potentialities in the act of living, and as such participate in the divine life. For Tillich, this is the meaning of the classical formulation—running through Aquinas and Spinoza alike—that God’s essence is God’s existence. Since “in God as God there is no distinction between potentiality and actuality” the language concerning the divine life is always symbolic. Insofar as being-itself manifests itself in, through, and to structured being, however, in the actualization of potentiality God is as both that which is “beyond the contrast of essential and existential” and that which empowers the movement of life in which Fall and creation coincide.

This detour through Tillich’s understanding of essence and existence was necessary, for it is only through that detour that we can understand what he means when he says that life is the actuality of being. Until now we have considered life as such only peripherally and only in the terms of potentiality and actualization, the transition of essence to existence. This way of considering life is an abstract analysis, as Scharlemann points out. The actualization of potentiality, moreover, has a characteristic function and operation which broadens Tillich’s definition of life—and it is with this definition that we will most directly work. It is with this second, more existential definition of life that we can most clearly see the divine life in its symbolic force and more clearly understand finite life as an instantiation of the divine life.

“Life was defined as the actualization of potential being. In every life process such actualization takes place,” Tillich recalls. He then proceeds to develop that first definition in terms of motion: “The terms ‘act,’ ‘action,’ ‘actual,’ denote a centrally
intended movement ahead, a going-out from a center of action. But this going-out takes place in such a way that the center is not lost in the outgoing movement. The self-identity remains in the self-alteration. . . . So we can distinguish three elements in the process of life: self-identity, self-alteration, and return to one’s self. Potentiality becomes actuality only through these three elements in the process which we call life.” Hence we can ontologically define life as the process by which potentiality becomes actuality, marked by self-identity, self-alteration, and return. This definition stresses process, motion, change, and growth, very much in keeping with our discussion in the first chapter of the will to power as a symbol of the power of being. With this definition in mind, then, let us now turn to a consideration of Tillich’s view of finite life before analytically relating this understanding of life to our guiding symbol—the divine life.

The Rejection of Hierarchical Ontology

The human mind, according to Tillich, necessarily seeks limiting principles that allow us to organize our manifold perceptions. “One of the most universal principles used for this purpose is that of a hierarchical order.” The model of an ontological hierarchy, oriented by the apex in God and structuring all of reality in a series of ranks of descending perfection, derives from neo-Platonism and runs through much of the history of theology. “In this view reality is seen as a pyramid of levels following each other in vertical direction according to their power of being and their grade of value,” Tillich explains, noting from the first the assumed connection between ontological level and moral value. He continues, “This imagery of rulers (archoi) in the term ‘hierarchy’ gives to the higher levels a higher quality but a smaller quantity of examples. The top is
monarchic, whether the monarch is a priest, an emperor, a god, or the God of monotheism." Though this model retains influence in contemporary theological and philosophical thought, it has also been sharply criticized by environmental ethicists and feminist theologians, among others.

Anne Primavesi provides an example of the way feminist theology and environmental concern can inform each other in her book *Sacred Gaia*. In regard to the ontological model of hierarchy, she rehearses two well-worn objections; while the first comes from a specifically feminist perspective, both show the ecological reaction against a hierarchical ordering of reality—an ordering that assigns a very specific, and, from this perspective, a very problematic place to organic life and, by extension, to nature.

First of all, as we saw in Tillich’s description, the hierarchical model has traditionally been cast in terms of a patriarchal kingship metaphor. This, according to liberation and feminist theologians, conjoins “deity and domination,” “monotheism and monarchy,” and, finally, “capitalist hegemonies supported by right-wing churches.” The hierarchical model also contributes to social structures in which “hierarchical authority structures,” explicitly affirmed to be modeled on the divine, ontological hierarchy, exercise “undue and oppressive influence on the lives of women.” In short, the hierarchical model understood in terms of a monarchical metaphor has been complicit in misogynistic violence and violence against a nature viewed as feminine—that is, in contrast with a “masculine” God—by providing the religious legitimation of oppression.

One of the strongest and most enduring distinctions made by men has been that between them and women/nature. This has been paralleled by an identification of women with Nature, which has led historically to a personification of “nature” as female, and to images of it as maternal, nurturing, fruitful, passive, and virginal, images bolstered by metaphorical clusters around seed, womb, fertility, and bareness which imply an active partner, man.
One assumes that Primavesi’s problem with a female personification of Nature in the symbol Gaia—the Earth Mother—is not problematic because maternity and nurturing are negative attributes. Rather, it is because maternity is imagined in terms of passivity, male activity is held as primarily important, and that activity is seen in terms of mastery that hierarchy supports oppression. The current project, though it does not accept the traditional, hierarchical ontology, retains the feminine Gaia as a central symbol for the life-giving activity of Nature as well as for the nurturing function, thus displacing the problematic connotations—this is the subject of a later chapter, however.

The second criticism of the hierarchical model is cast in more specifically ecological terms. This criticism finds a voice in Lynn White Jr.’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (which H. Paul Santmire quite rightly notes is ubiquitously referred to by those who write about the environmental crisis) as well as Rosemary Radford Ruether’s work in Liberation Theology and Arne Næss’s philosophy of deep ecology. According to this view, Christian theology re-casts the worldview of classical thought—a worldview characterized by a Platonic dualism separating the unchanging intellectual realm from the changing material, natural realm and neo-Platonic philosophy of hierarchical emanation from the One—in terms of Judeo-Christian mythology. In this mythological imagination God is absolutely separated from His creation, and man, made in the image of this God, is fundamentally estranged from the earth upon which he lives out his mortal existence. As we saw above, this alienation is played out culturally in a separation of male from female; it also fuels religious justifications for the domination not only of nature but also of those peoples considered closer to nature than “civilized Christians,” such as aboriginal groups.
More to the ecological point, however, the conceptual separation of the human being from nature conflicts with current scientific understandings of organic life and its environment in terms of co-evolutionary processes and ecological interdependence. The result of the conceptual and theological separation of humanity from nature, these critics claim, is an anthropocentric sense of moral value according to which only human beings can be said to have intrinsic value, and the “natural world” and its inhabitants can have only instrumental value relative to human interests. “In Gaia theory, however, and in coevolutionary theology, the existence of each organism ‘counts’ in respect of the whole, and each can be valued for what it is in itself. Intrinsic value can be attributed to bacteria as well as to ourselves,” Primavesi contends. The consequence of this view, for Primavesi at least, is that “each entity is considered a unique being and therefore, essentially ungradable. At a practical level of course, one may ‘count’ more than another.”

In that last claim, Primavesi may be going too far. The claim that each organism has value to the whole—in this case, to the Earth as a self-regulating and self-maintaining entity—and thus has value in and of itself is a far different claim than that there can be no difference in value among intrinsically valuable entities. Further, it is difficult to see how the practical and essential valuation are to be distinguished unless “practical” is to be read as “anthropocentric and instrumental,” a valuation that ecological theology seeks to displace. In any case, Tillich himself will not go so far, though he rejects the hierarchical ontology of classical philosophy and theology.

In fact, Tillich rejects that hierarchical model on the grounds that it separates what is essentially conjoined and co-determining. Though his concern here is ontological
rather than explicitly political or ecological, the issue of separation, estrangement, and alienation is central. Nor would Tillich deny that existential estrangement has social, political, and ecological ramifications. In any case, the problem with hierarchical ontology, for Tillich, is that it radically separates God from nature, and since human beings are made in the image of God, humanity is separated from both God and nature. Each occupies their own levels. “There is no organic movement from one to the other; the higher is not implicit in the lower, and the lower is not implicit in the higher. The relation of levels is that of interference, either by control or revolt.”

The implication inherent in hierarchical ontology that the relation of levels is not one of integration but of interference, Tillich claims, has resulted in a long history of very specific philosophical confusions:

The relation of the organic to the inorganic ‘level’ of nature leads to the recurrent problems of whether biological processes can be fully understood through the application of methods used in mathematical physics or whether a teleological principle must be used to explain the inner-directedness of organic growth. Under the dominance of the metaphor ‘level’ the inorganic either swallows the organic (control) or the inorganic processes are interfered with by a strange “vitalist” force . . . Another consequence of the metaphor ‘level’ appears in considering the relation of the organic and the spiritual, usually discussed as the relation of body and mind. If body and mind are levels, the problem of their relation can be solved only by reducing the mental to the organic (biologism and psychologism) or by asserting the interference of mental activities in the biological and psychological processes . . . The preceding example can lead to the question of whether the relation of God and man (including his world) can be described, as in religious dualism and theological supernaturalism, in terms of two levels—the divine and the human. Arrival at the decisive answer to this question is simplified through the attempt to demythologize religious language. Demythologization is not directed against the use of genuine mythical images as such but against the supernaturalistic method which takes these images literally. The enormity of the superstitious consequences following from this kind of supernaturalism sufficiently demonstrates the danger which the metaphor “level” poses in theological thought.
Thus the separation of inorganic and organic into distinct levels gives rise to the philosophical difficulty of resolving physical mechanism and organic directedness, and on the human level to the difficulties inherent in the so-called mind-body problem. Each of these is guided by a dualistic mythology read literally into theology and philosophy, present in Plato and given powerful imagery in a religious supernaturalism that separates the divine from the human according to a spatial metaphor.

**Dimensions and Realms**

As a corrective to the problematic ontological model of hierarchical levels, Tillich suggests new metaphors for the description of the interrelations or various aspects of life processes: dimensions, realms, and grades. Here, the metaphor of dimension, like that of level, is a spatial metaphor. Unlike the metaphor of level, however, the metaphor of dimension “describes the difference of the realms of being in such a way that there cannot be mutual interference; depth does not interfere with breadth, since all dimensions meet in the same point.” Hence, where the metaphor of levels leads to problems such as the mind-body problem, according to which there is a question of how a purely mechanistic and a purely psychic level can interact, “there is no conflict between dimensions.” This is not to say that life is free of conflicts. Rather, “the unity of life is seen above its conflicts. These conflicts are not denied, but they are not derived from the hierarchy of levels.”

In this model, the problematic ontological separation between the human world and the natural world does not come up. Life is affirmed in its multidimensional unity, while the fact is recognized that “there are wide areas of reality in which some
characteristics of life are not manifest at all.⁴⁴ That is, one need not animistically attribute consciousness to a stone to affirm that stone and human are belong equally to the multidimensional unity of life. This point will be pursued further in the next chapter on the panentheistic nature of Tillich’s system, for the affirmation stems from the implications of taking structured being in its manifold unity as the self-manifestation of being-itself—or, speaking symbolically, from the implication, supported by the co-evolutionary Gaia theory, that stone and human are together components of the divine life. On the other hand, as we will see below, this does not commit Tillich to Primavesi’s excessive claim that “each entity is considered a unique being and therefore, essentially ungradable.”⁴⁵ Rather, Tillich’s metaphor of dimensions does allow him to grade entities; it simply allows him to avoid an essential, ontological separation between human life and the manifold unity of life as such.

Dimensions, then, include the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual.⁶ In keeping with the Tillichian definition of life as the process by which potentiality becomes actuality, marked by self-identity, self-alteration, and return, in the life process the organic, psychic, and spiritual must be potentially present in the inorganic, though not yet actually present. Because of the multidimensional unity of being and its structural capacity for self-transcendence, the ever-increasing complexity of its manifestation is present in the structure of being as potentiality. Bringing ever-more complex, encompassing, and centered entities into being involves all the structural elements of being—dynamics and form, individualization and participation, freedom and

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* This list of dimensions matches the list of levels in the offensive models. Tillich’s intention, however, is not to distinguish new dimensions (or grades of being), but to develop a metaphorical resource for imagining the grades of being according to which the relations between them are not characterized by interference but by integration—or, as Tillich puts it, in terms of “manifold unity.”
destiny—allows for the spontaneity, change, and experimentation characteristic of the
dynamic, dialectical development of the self-manifestation of being. The structure of
human being is the structure of being as such, developed to sufficient complexity to allow
for self-transcendence in creaturely freedom. The capacity for growth is built into the
structure of being just as it is built into the structure of organic life, and because that
growth can take on an infinity of finite forms, the potential for the development of
consciousness is present even in the inorganic. The structure of individualization and
participation in the inorganic, for example, is the condition of the possibility for self and
world in the human being. An entity of sufficient complexity, actualizing the
potentialities inherent in the structure of being, thus gives rise to consciousness,
awareness, and self-awareness. Thus an important implication of Tillich’s doctrine of the
manifold unity of being is that there is no room in the system for a “soul” added to inert
“matter”—rather, Tillich shows that the spiritual grows out of the inorganic. This will be
given content in the next two divisions, especially where we consider the idea that every
entity has its own space and its own time.

Moreover, there are two conditions for the actualization of a particular dimension
of life: first, other, prior dimensions must already be actualized; second, particular
constellations of dimensions make possible further actualizations. Again, this model is
well in keeping with evolutionary theory:

Billions of years may have passed before the inorganic realm permitted the
appearance of objects in the organic dimension, and millions of years before the
organic realm permitted the appearance of a being with language. [In fact it was
likely more than three billion years between the earliest organic life forms
appeared on earth and the appearance of modern humans.] Again, it took tens of
thousands of years before the being with the power of language became the
historical man whom we know as ourselves. Potential dimensions of being
became actual in all these cases because conditions were present for the actualization of that which had always been potentially real.\textsuperscript{46}

The last sentence of this quote points to Tillich’s doctrine of essences, according to which essences—“the nature of a thing,” the conceptual “universals which characterize a thing,” and “the patterns of all things in the divine mind”\textsuperscript{47}—must always exist as potentialities, as aspects of the process of self-manifestation, though not as actualities.

In addition, the above quote seems to conflate realms and dimensions. As is so often the case, these two terms are difficult to distinguish in Tillich’s actual usage, and often seem to be used synonymously. This is not terribly problematic, since both are correlative metaphorical concepts; the difference between them, though, is subtle but worth noting. The rejected metaphor of levels, as we have noted, has both a spatial and a political sense (though the political sense is not necessary, but intrinsic). The metaphor of dimensions, for Tillich, is spatial—the metaphor of realms is social. “One speaks of the ruler of a realm, and just this connotation makes the metaphor adequate, because in the metaphorical sense a realm is a section of reality in which a special dimension determines the character of each and every individual belonging to it, whether it is an atom or a man.”\textsuperscript{48} This metaphor avoids the problems inherent in the political sense of the hierarchical metaphor, however, for while in a hierarchy interaction is limited to interference or disruption—depending on the direction—an ontological realm is determined by a dimension which can only be actualized by the actualization of prior dimensions. Hence, dimensions include the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual—realms include the vegetable, the animal, and the historical.

Where realms are determined by the dimension most fully realized in them, dimensions are determined according to their particular modification of the ontological
categories by which human being knows or grasps being. The theologically significant categories for Tillich—as we discussed in Chapter I—include time, space, causality, and substance. “One is justified in speaking of a particular dimension when the phenomenological description of a section of encountered reality shows unique categorical and other structures.”\textsuperscript{49} This is not to say that only certain categories are present in certain dimensions. Clearly, any dimension of reality will involve time, space, causality, and substance. Rather, reason grasps particular manifestations of being through their particular modifications of these categories.

In other words, according to Tillich, the manifestation of being, grasped according to the categories of knowing, is conditioned in its manifestation to reason according to the dimension to which a particular manifestation belongs.

The particular character of a dimension which justifies its establishment as a dimension can best be seen in the modification of time, space, causality, and substance under its predominance. These categories have universal validity for everything that exists. But this does not mean that there is only one time, space, and so on. For the categories change their character under the predominance of each dimension. Things are not in time and space; rather, they have a definite time and space. . . . However, this does not mean that the categories, for example, in their inorganic character disappear in the organic realms or that clock time is annihilated by historical time. The categorical forms which belong to a conditioning realm, such as the inorganic in relation to the organic, enters the new categorical form as an element within it.\textsuperscript{50}

As we saw in Chapter I, the categories are the structures of reason by which the mind grasps reality—still, due to the primordial unity of subject and object in the grounding depth of being which is manifest in the structure of being, the categories are ontological. They are “forms of finitude,” and thus the mind cannot get beyond the categories of knowing to directly grasp being-itself—this is precisely the dynamic that makes the ground of being an abyss. Still, they do allow the mind to grasp structured being, for the
mind is itself structured by evolution such that it can grasp the structure of reality, though never completely.

Yet how is it that Tillich can say that, since the categories change their character under the predominance of each dimension, it is not the case that there is but one time and space; that “things are not in time and space; rather, they have a definite time and space”? This is a difficult claim to unpack, and Tillich’s ontological discussion of this point gives us little more than the bare assertion. Here, therefore, a brief digression into a discussion of the modern concept of nature from R. G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of Nature* can be helpful—a digression that is justified because, after all, this dissertation centrally concerns the concept of Nature. Furthermore, it will be seen that Tillich’s ontological description of life is well in keeping with the modern concept of nature as Collingwood presents it and, in later chapters, that both understandings are in consistent with the Gaia theory’s co-evolutionary model.

Greek, Post-Renaissance, and Modern Views of Nature

Collingwood’s book is a detailed historical study running from the Ionian science of nature of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE through Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, through Copernicus, Bacon, Galileo, and Leibniz, through Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel, into Darwin’s evolutionary biology and its modern proponents, and even into theoretical physics as it stood in the middle of the twentieth century. A full explication of Collingwood’s study is clearly beyond the scope of our present discussion of Tillich’s metaphorical presentation of the dimensions, realms, and grades of life. We digress into Collingwood’s study only to shed light on Tillich’s claim that the various dimensions of life condition the categories of being and knowing. Two of these categories are time and
space, and it is in terms of time and space that Collingwood’s idea of the modern view of nature can help us understand Tillich’s thorny claim. For our purposes here it will therefore suffice to note that he distinguishes three conceptual periods in the development of the idea of Nature: the Greek, the Renaissance (or, perhaps better, the post-Renaissance or early modern), and the modern periods. Each of these has its own distinct understanding of Nature—and, by extension, natural science—and each is based on a characteristic analogy.

“Greek natural science,” Collingwood contends, “was based on the principle that the world of nature is saturated or permeated by mind,” an “all-pervading vitality and rationality.”51 Tillich’s idea of logos as the inherent rationality of the structure of reality graspable (at least imperfectly) by human reason retains that Greek sensibility. The analogy upon which Greek natural science was based was “the analogy between the macrocosm nature and the microcosm man.”52 Thus, in this view, the natural world as a whole is fully organic: “Since the world of nature is a world not only of ceaseless motion and therefore alive, but also a world of orderly or regular motion, they accordingly said that the world of nature is not only alive but intelligent; not only a vast animal with a ‘soul’ or life of its own, but a rational animal with a ‘mind of its own.’” Collingwood continues (in phrasing apropos to our development of our guiding symbol, the divine life), “a plant or animal, according to their ideas, participates in its own degree psychically in the life process of the world’s ‘soul’ and intellectually in the activity of the world’s ‘mind’, no less than it participates materially in the physical organization of the world’s ‘body’.”53
Of course, when we note the affinities of this early concept of Nature to Tillich’s—and, by extension, to that which we will develop in Part Two—we recognize that some twenty-five centuries or more, with all their philosophical, cultural, theological, and scientific developments, lie between the ancient Greek philosophers of nature and ourselves. Yet it is worth noting that the manner of thinking that makes the earth an organic whole, and that sees a connection between human understanding and the *logos*-structure of being, has a long and venerable history. Indeed, it is a central intention of this project to correct the problematic understanding of Nature that gripped and helped shape the Western world with the Renaissance and early modern periods. This understanding was further bolstered by a Judeo-Christian and neo-Platonic anthropology that separated human beings from the natural world and placed Nature at humanity’s disposal as a collection of resources to be utilized for human, instrumental purposes. Though science has moved on from post-Renaissance mechanistic thinking our conceptual relationship to Nature retains much of the destructive separatism inherent in it.

The Renaissance view of nature “began to take shape as antithetical to the Greek view in the work of Copernicus” and other thinkers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. “The central point of this antithesis was the denial that the world of nature, the world studied by physical science, is an organism.” This shift, according to Collingwood, originates from a shifting analogical understanding of the relation of the human world and the natural world—and, especially, by the way in which the newer analogy reinforced the conceptual separation of human from nature:

First, it is based on the Christian idea of a creative and omnipotent God. Secondly, it is based on the human experience of designing and constructing
machines. The Greeks and Romans were not machine users, except to a very small extent: their catapults and water-clocks were not a prominent enough feature of their life to affect the way in which they conceived the relation between themselves and the world. But by the sixteen century the Industrial Revolution was well on the way. The printing-press and the windmill, the lever, the pump, and the pulley, the clock and the wheel-barrow, and a host of machines in use among miners and engineers were established features of daily life. Everyone understood the nature of a machine, and the experience of making and using such things had become a part of the general consciousness of European man. It was an easy step to the proposition: as a clockmaker or millwright is to a clock or mill, so is God to Nature.55

The watchmaker argument that William Paley presented to demonstrate the existence of God is clearly an example of this analogical thinking in action, and it is characteristic of the period’s understanding of the natural world. In this view, God does not live in and through creation, as Tillich’s discussions of the divine life suggest—God imposes the laws of nature regulating its orderly movement entirely from without, just as an engineer imposes the orderly composition and motions of a machine upon the raw materials he shapes according to his design.

In this view, then, the natural world is not an organism—it is a machine. Whereas the Greeks saw the order of the natural world as an expression of “nature’s own intelligence,” in early modern thought order was imposed on nature by “the intelligence of something other than nature: the divine creator and ruler of nature.”56 From here it is a short step to extend the analogy. As a clockmaker or millwright is to a clock or mill, so is God to Nature. While nature is purely mechanical, lacking intelligence and vitality but where it is imposed from outside, human beings—created in the image of God—are possessed of intelligence and an immortal soul that controls the movements of the body, itself understood mechanistically. This, of course, is precisely the conceptual constellation that allowed Descartes to famously deny any moral duty to animals on the
grounds that, lacking souls, they are mere machines. Moreover, this same understanding
leads to the difficulties attendant with the so-called mind-body problem that since
Descartes has bedeviled Western philosophy, as Tillich rightly notes, according to
hierarchical model of ontology in combination with a mechanistic view of nature.

That problem, of course, does not entirely originate with Descartes. In both
Greek and Renaissance thought, Collingwood notes, “nothing is knowable unless it is
unchanging.” In Greek thought this finds paradigmatic expression in Plato’s theory of
the forms, that unchanging, intellectual reality giving shape to the ever-changing natural
world. Renaissance thinkers argued that behind the “continual and all-pervading change”
characteristic of the natural world “lay other things, the true objects of natural science,
knowable because unchanging.” The first of these was “‘substance’ or ‘matter,’ itself not
subject to change, whose changing arrangements and dispositions were the realities
whose appearances to our sensibility took the shape of secondary qualities,” like color,
smell, and sound. “Secondly, there were the ‘laws’ according to which these
arrangements and dispositions changed.”

By the nineteenth century, however, the idea of an “unchanging substrate behind
the changes” was being questioned. This modern view of nature “is based on the
analogy between the processes of the natural world as studied by natural scientists and
the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians.” This view is influenced by
the theory of evolution, which upset the earlier view that each individual species had
been created as it was for its particular niche by the guiding and organizing divine
intelligence. It is further developed by modern physics, which views “matter” not as an
unchanging substance but itself a process. That shift, Collingwood argues, is of supreme
importance. In a machine “structure and function are distinct, and function presupposes structure.” Thus, in the mechanistic view of the natural world, the structure is built to function as it does all at once—it is knowable because it is unchanging, and it must be unchanging: “It is impossible to describe one and the same thing in the same breath as a machine and as developing or evolving. Something which is developing may build itself machines but it cannot be a machine,” Collingwood explains. “A machine is essentially a finished product or a closed system. Until it is finished it is not a machine. While it is being built it is not functioning as a machine; it cannot do that until it is complete; therefore it can never develop.”

The consequences of the shift that occurs when structure is understood in terms of function (for example, when matter is understood as a continual process of atomic and molecular interactions and reactions) are profound. First, the mechanistic view of nature becomes untenable: “Nature will be understood as consisting of processes, and the existence of any special kind of thing in nature will be understood as meaning that processes of a special kind are going on there.” Second—and this is the point to which we have been leading—each special type of process requires a minimum amount of space and time to occur, without which the thing constituted by the process cannot be said to exist. This brings temporality, the mark of finitude, into the entire being of the natural world—and it allows us to give content to Tillich’s claim, “The particular character of a dimension which justifies its establishment as a dimension can best be seen in the modification of time, space, causality, and substance under its predominance. . . . For the categories change their character under the predominance of each dimension. Things are not in time and space; rather, they have a definite time and space.”
Collingwood calls the principle that any given sort of “natural substance” exists “only in an appropriate amount of space and during an appropriate amount of time” the principles of minimum space and minimum time.\(^{64}\) In a smaller amount of space and time the processes necessary for the existence of a thing cannot occur. In a longer amount of time, the processes do not cease—the thing does not cease to exist—but they do become part of longer and larger sets of processes. For example, Collingwood says, look to the water molecule:

According to the principle of minimum space, wherever there is a natural substance \(s_1\) (such as water), there is a smallest possible quantity of it (the molecule of water), anything less than which will not be a piece of that substance but a piece of a smaller substance (oxygen and hydrogen). According to the principle of minimum time, there is a minimum time \(t\), during which the movement of the (oxygen and hydrogen) atoms within a single molecule (of water) can establish their rhythm and thus constitute that single molecule. In a lapse of time smaller than \(t\), the (oxygen and hydrogen) atoms exist, but the molecule does not exist. There is no \(s_1\); there is only \(s_2\), the class of substance to which oxygen and hydrogen belong. . . . If the question is raised, therefore, whether a given thing is an example of \(s_1\), of \(s_2\), or of \(s_3\), the answer depends on the question: In how long a time? If in a time of the order of \(t_1\), it is an example of \(s_1\); if in a time of the order of \(t_2\), it is an example of \(s_2\); if in a time of the order of \(t_3\), it is an example of \(s_3\). Different orders of substance take different orders of time lapse to exist.\(^{65}\)

That is, what a thing is—what universal (concept) and what particular (percept) are combined to form its being, in our ontological language—will depend on the time and space that it has. In other words, the philosophical question “What is it really?” can, in many cases (such as in the mind-body problem cited above) be resolved in terms of the phase at which it is observed.

For example: Is a human being really only a collection of atoms, deterministically structured with only the illusion of freedom, or is it really an embodied soul? This question carries weight in the Renaissance view of a mechanistic nature governed by
immutable laws imposed by an outside intelligence—if it can be shown, on this view, that there is no “outside intelligence” then the question of the nature of the human soul takes on supreme importance. According to the view that resolves substance into function, however, the human being really is a collection of atoms, an arrangement of cellular processes, a free individual, and a component of the co-evolutionary life of Gaia, all at once. It is simply a matter of scale.

At the atomic “level” there is, in a real sense, no human being at all, for the processes of human life cannot get going at that scale—yet when we observe processes at the organic “level,” the atomic does not cease to exist—the human being does not stop being composed of atoms. In Tillich’s language, life is manifold unity, and life processes—whether human or otherwise—are actualizations of the potentialities appropriate to particular dimensions. In this understanding each dimension depends upon prior dimensional potentialities having been actualized, and actualized in ways that make possible further actualization of further potentialities.

The Dimensions and their Relation

The above digression will become more relevant in Part Two, but it was placed here to give specific content to Tillich’s claim that particular dimensions modify the categories of finitude in accordance with their specific character. Collingwood discusses time and space explicitly, and speaks to the category of substance with the modern view that substance is resolved to function. Thus each type of thing, which has specific functions without which the thing would not be the thing that it is, has a type of substance specific to it.
This view is set against both Greek and Renaissance views in that it is not necessary to metaphysically define what substance is as such. That is, we do not need to describe an unchanging substance that is universally identical in all things and that stays what it is in the course of each and every change. Still, though—and this is a point that will be important in our discussion of the dialectical dynamic of life—we can say that in each change something remains identical: particular processes composed of particular functions that allow the thing to be the thing that it is through the course of change. Hence, Tillich’s ontological definition of substance as the ontological factor of permanence within change, that “something underlying the flux of appearances” that nonetheless “is nothing beyond the accidents in which it expresses itself” cited in Chapter I is also given content.66 The category of causality can also be viewed in this way, according to which there may be different sorts of causality according to the dimension of life appropriate to them without us needing to, for instance, resolve freedom into mechanistic determinism or posit an “interfering” free soul that cuts into the causal processes of nature. “Such considerations,” integral to his rejection of the ontological model of hierarchy and its replacement with that of dimensions and realms, Tillich can therefore claim, “provide a solid basis for the rejection of all kinds of reductionist ontology, both naturalistic and idealistic.”67

On this basis Tillich can proceed to discuss the relation of the dimensions and realms in terms of his ontological definition of life as such, as the process by which potentiality becomes actuality, marked by self-identity, self-alteration, and return. We will recall that the dimensions of life include the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual. The inorganic is “the first condition for the actualization of every
dimension.” The inorganic has its own time, space, and causality, as we saw above. In particular, in the inorganic dimension, “potentialities become actual in those things in time and space which are subject to physical analysis or which can be measured in spatial-temporal-causal relations.”

The second dimension, the dimension of organic life, is of central importance due to the influence of the “philosophies of life”—particularly that of Nietzsche—on Tillich’s thought. “The dimension of the organic is so central for every philosophy of life,” he writes, “that linguistically the basic meaning of ‘life’ is organic life.” That linguistic meaning of life must be qualified in two senses, however. On the one hand, as we have already noted, the linguistic, organic sense of life is based in the universal, ontological meaning of life as Tillich describes it: “If the actualization of potential is a structural condition of all beings, and if this actualization is called ‘life,’ then stars and rocks, their growth and their decay, must be called a life process.” Everything that is, is in the process of becoming that which it is not-yet, while remaining that which it is, as the process of the actualization of potentiality. On the other hand, the term “organic life” itself incorporates several dimensions:

The structural difference between a typical representative of the vegetable realm and that of the animal realm makes the establishment of two dimensions [within that of “organic life”] advisable, despite the indefiniteness of the transition between them. This decision is supported by the fact that in the realm which is determined by the animal dimension, another dimension makes its appearance: the self-awareness of life—the psychic (if this word can be saved from its occultist connotations). The organic dimension is characterized by self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-containing Gestalten (“living wholes”).

This last point concerning the fact that the organic as such is characterized by “self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-containing Gestalten” will be of central importance
to the discussion of the name of Gaia as a religious symbol for the living Earth in Part Three.

Where the dimension of the self-awareness of life—the psychic—makes its appearance within and on the basis of the organic, the spiritual dimension presupposes as its condition the psychic: “Under special conditions the dimension of inner awareness, or the psychological realm, actualizes within itself another dimension, that of the personal-communal or the ‘spirit.’” Tillich’s thoughts concerning the idea of “spirit” are varied and complex, and deserve a study of their own. Here we can briefly mention only a few important elements. First, Tillich distinguishes capital-S “Spirit” from “spirit” as a dimension of life. The first, “Spirit,” refers to “the divine Spirit and its effects on man”; this is not our present concern. The second, “spirit,” concerns “the particularly human dimension of life.” It is distinguished from the psychic because while the dimension of spirit has the psychic dimension as its condition, the psychic is actualized in non-human animals (and, perhaps, other forms of organic life as well) the dimension of spirit a uniquely human development of the psychic dimension.

The term “spirit,” Tillich reports, is rooted in words meaning “breath,” in both “the Semitic as well as in the Indo-Germanic languages.” As such, spirit speaks to the “power of life,” that which animates the inorganic. The power of life cannot be separated from that which it animates in the organic system, as we discussed at length above. The tendency to separate the power that animates the organic from the inorganic “substance” that is animated finds its fulfillment, Tillich claims, in the irresolvable problems expressed in the dualistic philosophies of Descartes and the English empiricists—irresolvable because they insisted in separating that which is in its essence a
manifold unity. “The word [‘spirit’] received the connotation ‘mind,’ and ‘mind’ itself
received the connotation ‘intellect.’” We saw above how it was that this fusion was tied
up in the ontological metaphor of hierarchy and the Renaissance view of nature as a
machine given form and purpose by an outside intelligence to separate mind from body,
humanity from nature, and God from creation. We also saw that Tillich rejects this
ontological model in the strongest of terms. Spirit, for Tillich, does not constitute a
“realm apart from life”—it is necessarily a dimension of life.

Instead of a definition involving separation, then, Tillich defines “spirit” as “the
unity of power and meaning.” But what can this possibly mean? In short, the spiritual
dimension involves a particular function of mind, though “mind” cannot be held to be
synonymous with “spirit.” Mind, rather, “expresses the consciousness of a living being
in relation to its surroundings and to itself.” It is the actualization of the psychic
potentiality in the dimension of the organic:

It includes awareness, perception, intention. It appears in the dimension of
animality as soon as self-awareness appears; and in rudimentary or developed
form, it includes intelligence, will, directed action. Under the predominance of
the dimension of spirit, i.e., in man, it is related to the universals in perception and
intention. It is structurally determined by reason . . . Spirit as a dimension of life
includes more than reason—it includes eros, passion, imagination—but without
logos-structure, it could not express anything.

Thus spirit as a dimension of life requires as the condition for the possibility of its
actualization a particular constellation of prior dimensions, including the inorganic and
psychic. It requires the actualization of a constellation of organic potentialities—mind—and requires mind for its expression. It appears in the human being and not in other
animals, though other animals may share the psychic capacities of mind, including
intellect and will.
Moreover, as the unity of power and meaning, spirit is related to universals—concepts, essences, structures of being—in perception and intention. It is because human life actualizes the dimension of spirit that human beings can intentionally, consciously project themselves out ahead of themselves into their lives. We noted above that life as life involves “going out beyond itself” in a process marked by self-identity, self-alteration, and return. In the human being this process becomes the object of reflexive awareness—hence human beings live “existentially” in the fullest sense of the word, relating to and engaging with their own existence as an object of anxious concern. Spirit as a dimension of life allows human beings to live morally and creatively.

Human beings can and do live creatively and morally precisely because they can relate to universals in perception and intention. The spiritual dimension thus names the specifically human capacity to relate to one’s self as an object of thought in reflexive self-awareness, then to relate that self not only to what is but to what could be, and on that basis to imagine what should be. When the spiritual dimension is dominant, the psychological center—that which allows awareness to be self-awareness—is able to transcend itself and the merely psychical:

The transcendence of the center over the psychological material makes the cognitive act possible [that is, the cognitive act that organizes perceptual and psychological material according to conceptual schema], and such an act is a manifestation of spirit. We said that the personal center is not identical with any one of the psychological contents, but neither is it another element added to them; if it were this, it would be psychological material itself and not the bearer of spirit. . . . The psychological center, the subject of self-awareness, moves in the realm of higher animal life as a balanced whole, organically or spontaneously (but not mechanically) dependent on the total situation. If the dimension of the spirit dominates a life process, the psychological center offers its own contents to the unity of the personal center. This happens through deliberation and decision. In doing so it actualizes its own potentialities, but in actualizing its own potentialities, it transcends itself.
The self-transcendence of the spirit is the fullest actualization of the processes characterizing life—self-identity, self-alteration, and return—understood as a going-out-beyond. The process is actualized in awareness, and can be made an object of reflexive self-awareness as a determining mode of the divine life. Far from separating the human being from the natural world and the processes characteristic of inorganic and organic life, however, this fullest actualization of the life processes develops upon and incorporates those prior dimensions in its own actualization as the conditions for its possibility.

*The Dialectical Dynamic of Life*

“Life was defined as the actualization of potential being.” We have discussed this point above in regards to Tillich’s ontological definition of life. He continues, “The terms ‘act,’ ‘action,’ ‘actual,’ denote a centrally intended movement ahead, a going-out from a center of action. But this going-out takes place in such a way that the center is not lost in the outgoing movement.”81 Having considered the relations of dimensions and realms we can now turn to this idea of life understood as a movement out ahead of itself. That movement, Tillich explains, involves three elements—self-identity, self-alteration, and return—and each element is expressed in and through the three functions of life related to them. The three elements of life are not to be confused with the ontological elements—individualization and participation, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny—though each function depends on one of these basic polarities. Finally, just as each dimension of life modifies the categories of finitude in accordance with its specific
character, each function of life modifies the elements of life in accordance with its special character. Hence each function of life involves all three elements of life.

Each of the three functions of life captures an aspect of Nietzsche’s symbol, the will to power, the will “towards the higher, more distant, more manifold.” The first function of life is *self-integration*, through which “self-identity is established, drawn into self-alteration, and re-established with the contents of that into which it has been altered.” This is the movement in which centeredness—or identity—is actualized. Life itself drives toward centeredness, through alteration and back to centeredness, and hence this circular motion is a function present in every life process. The second function of life is *self-creation*, growth. “Life drives toward the new,” Tillich explains, and it does so in two modes. “Growth in the circular movement of a self-centered being” is the alteration that interrupts self-identity and leads into re-integration. Growth also involves “the creation of new centers beyond the circle.” In either case, this function involves a “horizontal motion.” The third function of life—*self-transcendence*—involves a “vertical motion.” In a very real sense, the first and second functions can be called a sort of self-transcendence, but Tillich retains the title for the vertical function: “One finite situation is transcended by another; but finite life is not transcended,” Tillich writes. “Therefore, it seems appropriate to reserve the term ‘self-transcendence’ for that function of life in which this does occur—in which life drives beyond itself as life.” Here a consideration of the function of self-transcendence would take us far afield of the subject of this chapter, the purpose of which is to provide content to the symbol of the divine life through a consideration of the finite life it animates and engenders.
Rather, we should avoid that digression to note a few salient points about self-integration and ambiguity, for this will be of importance to our discussions of Nature and Gaia. Self-integration, we noted above, is the function of life through which self-identity is established—it is the movement in which centeredness is actualized. Centeredness is the ontological structure that makes possible identity, that which allows a thing to be a particular, single, unique entity. Centeredness involves the unification of multiplicity, the creation of “the point of direction of the two basic movements of all life processes”—self integration and self-alteration—“as a process of outgoing and returning. For where there is a center, there is a periphery which includes an amount of space or, in non-metaphorical terms, which unites a manifoldness of elements.” It is in the organic realm that this centeredness is most sharply manifest—every living being exists and reacts as a whole, developing as a balanced unity of multiple processes. “Its life is a process of going out and returning to itself as long as it lives.” As a finite being, however—that is, under the conditions of existence—that unity is always subject to the possibility of destruction. As Tillich puts it, “this unity is threatened by existential estrangement, which drives life in one or the other direction thus disrupting the unity.” This Tillich calls the ambiguity of life, that the positive is always subject to disruption by the negative.

Hence, life is always characterized by a process of going out beyond itself while retaining its center, integrating the manifold processes that make it what it is under the unity of self-identity. That process of going out beyond is the very process whereby potentiality is actualized, and the unification of ever-more complex manifolds constitutes the life process as such. This increasing complexity is possible on the basis of prior
actualizations, and thus Tillich replaces the metaphor of levels with that of dimensions and realms. With this in mind, we can now turn briefly to his discussion of grades of value before concluding with a fully grounded discussion of the divine life in terms of dual participation and in terms of its symbolic function.

**Grades of Being and Value**

Above we mentioned that Anne Primavesi’s claim that each entity is “essentially ungradable” does not necessarily follow from the fact that each should be “considered a unique being.” In fact the claim takes the rejection of the problematic elements of hierarchical ordering too far. It is not necessary that we collapse all distinctions of value between varieties of organisms in order to deny the claim that only human organisms have moral value; indeed Primavesi’s claim that organisms are ungradable actually seems to rob us of important ethical traction when it comes to deciding between competing interests between human and non-human realms. Tillich’s ontological description of life as the actualization of potentiality, in contrast, provides conceptual tools allowing us to hold both that non-human organisms have intrinsic value and that human life can, on certain bases, be held to hold more value than certain other types of organisms.

Some of the more important ethical implications of reading Gaia theory theologically will be addressed in Part Three—especially in Chapter IX—particularly involving the notion of intrinsic value as a characteristic of life as such, and thus the intrinsic value of a living Earth. Here we are primarily concerned with analyzing Tillich’s ontological theology in such a way as to provide a philosophical and theological
ground for our discussion of Nature as a concept and Gaia as a corresponding symbol.

Still, some consideration of the problem is necessary here.

One influential statement concerning the idea of intrinsic value of living organisms, apart from any instrumental value for humans they might bear, comes from the environmental ethicist Paul W. Taylor. His biocentric (or, “life-centered”) ethics rejects hierarchical ordering of the sort that equates ontological level with moral value:

Most people consider our own species to be superior to all other species and this superiority is understood to be a matter of inherent worth, not merit. There may exist thoroughly vicious and depraved humans who lack all merit. Yet because they are human they are thought to belong to a higher class of entities than any plant or animal. That one is born into the species *Homo sapiens* entitles one to have lordship over those who are one’s inferiors, namely those born into other species. . . . But this is surely irrational and arbitrary. Why should the arrangement of genes of a certain type be a mark of superior value, especially when this fact about an organism is taken by itself, unrelated to any other aspects of its life? . . . Rejecting the notion of human superiority entails its positive counterpart: the doctrine of species impartiality. One who accepts that doctrine regards all living things as possessing inherent worth—the *same* inherent worth, since no one species has been shown to be “higher” or “lower” than any other.90

We wish to hold with Taylor that all living things possess inherent worth—and we will show that Tillich’s ontology of life allows us to make that claim in a way that is philosophically grounded—but we also wish to reject the claim that all things possess the same inherent worth, if that is held to mean that all living things possess the same degree of inherent worth. That is, if inherent worth is held to be something that one either has or does not have, if it is simply a quality that admits of no gradations of quantity or extent, then all living beings can be said to have inherent worth. Taylor wants to deny that one species can be said to have more value than another, however. We will consider how it is that this can be both true and untrue depending on how one couches the issue below. If all living beings possess the same inherent worth in the same degree, however, the
resolution of ethical conflicts between a bacteria (for example) and a human being becomes difficult to resolve. Taylor himself admits this. We need to affirm inherent value without running afoul of this *reductio ad absurdum*.

Taylor’s basic point is correct, though: Human statements of ontological superiority are based in claims that, at best, are question-begging. Human characteristics such as rational thought, technological mastery, aesthetic creativity, and autonomous self-determination, when taken as the hallmark of human superiority, claim human superiority from a strictly human point of view. “To use only standards based on human values is already to commit oneself to holding that humans are superior to nonhumans, which is the point in question.” If this does in fact render most claims to human superiority in terms of value “irrational and arbitrary,” which seems to be the case, then what standards for determining the value of an entity can we use? “If all living things have a good of their own,” Taylor answers, “it at least makes sense to judge the merits of nonhumans by standards derived from their good.”

This is the basis of Taylor’s concept of inherent worth, which in turns marks the axis of his life-centered ethics:

Every organism, species population, and community of life has a good of its own which moral agents can intentionally further or damage by their actions. To say that an entity has a good of its own is simply to say that, without reference to any other entity, it can be benefitted or harmed. . . . What is good for an entity is what “does it good” in the sense of enhancing or preserving its life or well-being. What is bad for an entity is something that is detrimental to its life and well-being.

We can think of the good of an individual nonhuman organism as consisting in the full development of its biological powers. . . . When construed in this way, the concept of a being’s good is not coextensive with sentience or a capacity for feeling pain. . . .

The principle of intrinsic value states that, regardless of what kind of entity it is in other respects, if it is a member of the Earth’s community of life, the realization of its good is something *intrinsically* valuable. This means that its
good is prima facie worthy of being preserved or promoted as an end in itself and for the sake of the entity whose good it is.\textsuperscript{93}

We need not accept Taylor’s ethical theory in all of its particulars—in fact some problems will be mentioned in the next paragraph and before the end of this section. The purpose of presenting the rudiments of his thought here is simply to begin to develop a vocabulary of “intrinsic value” apart from metaphysical speculations and grounded in a consideration of life as organic life. We will develop upon Taylor’s ideas using Tillich’s philosophy. We will reject his “species impartiality” in some important ways, while retaining his conception of intrinsic value as it is connected to the good of each particular organism, species, and life community.

Before proceeding to discuss the idea that all living entities possess intrinsic value in terms of Tillich’s ontology of life, though, we should pause to note a few brief points. First, it is not clear what the addition of the qualifier, “if it is a member of the Earth’s community of life,” adds to the principle. Indeed, it would seem that an extra-terrestrial being showing the markers of organic life and having a good of its own should be held to have intrinsic value for the same reason—that it has a good of its own. Second—and this will be important as we proceed—the phrase linking nonhuman goods to purely biological powers is unnecessarily limiting. Certainly the human good goes beyond the merely biological—humans develop powers in other dimensions, such as the emotional and artistic. Yet nonhuman animals also develop many of these powers, including the emotional and even the artistic, and we should not sign on to any ethical principle that denies these. Indeed it is certain that Taylor himself would not wish to deny the emotional power of nonhuman animals. Third and finally, this language reminds us of the theological humanism of Klemm and Schweiker, according to which the “integrity of
life” is a central moral principle requiring “a commitment to the well-being of other forms of life.”

For our purposes in the present chapter, though, the important point is the connection of Taylor’s biocentric affirmation of the intrinsic value of all organisms to Tillich’s ontology of life. According to Taylor, intrinsic value is cast in terms of each organism’s “good of its own,” which is in turn understood in terms of its development of its characteristic powers. It is here that the connection to Tillich comes to the fore, for it is no stretch to translate Taylor’s language of “development of powers” into Tillich’s language of “actualization of potentiality.” Moreover, Tillich provides conceptual tools that allow us to affirm the intrinsic value of all organisms while avoiding the over-reaching conclusion that Taylor and Primavesi share, that “each entity is considered a unique being and therefore, essentially ungradable.” In fact, Tillich specifically suggests that we reject the ontological metaphor of hierarchy of being—which brings the hierarchy of value along with it—and replace it with “the metaphor ‘dimension,’ together with correlative concepts such as ‘realm’ and ‘grade.’”

We have discussed the first two terms at length—we now turn to the third.

We have seen that organic life—the linguistically and philosophically central and basic meaning of the term, “life”—is characterized by “self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-continuing Gestalten (‘living wholes’).” These Gestalten actualize potentialities in a process of going-out-beyond and return, and they do so on the basis of the prior actualization of constitutive constellations of potentialities in preceding dimensions under special circumstances. It is these Gestalten that develop their powers as “goods of their own.” Since each subsequent dimension not only depends upon and
incorporates *Gestalten* of preceding dimensions but also develops new, more extensive powers, it is proper to speak of grades of goods—or, grades of value. Granted, no subsequent potentiality could be developed without the prior actualization of prior dimensions of potentiality. Thus, there is no sharp break in ontological standing or value—this is precisely why Tillich introduces “dimensions” to replace “levels” as an ontological metaphor.

Still, against his earlier rejection of the terms, Tillich returns to the vocabulary of “higher” and “lower” when he discusses the distinctions between species and varieties of life—precisely the sort of language Primavesi and Taylor reject. This language remains problematic, and it is perhaps unfortunate that Tillich allowed it to slip in. For our part we will strive to make the same point using terms such as “grade,” “subsequent” and “preceding” (or synonymous terms), and more or less “extensive.” Tillich’s ultimate point, however, will be affirmed. He writes:

One distinguishes between lower and higher forms of life in the realm of the organic. Something must be said about this distinction from the theological point of view, because of the wide symbolic use to which all forms of organic life, especially the higher ones, are subject and because of the fact that man—against the protest of many naturalists—is often called the highest living being. First of all, one should not confuse the “highest” with the “most perfect.” Perfection means actualization of one’s potentialities; therefore, a lower being can be more perfect than a higher one if it is actually what it is potentially—at least in a high approximation. And the highest being—man—can become less perfect than any other, because he not only can fail to actualize his essential being but can deny and distort it.98

What, then, are the criteria by which we can determine distinctions in value according to this ontology? There are two, Tillich holds: “the definiteness of the center, on the one hand, and the amount of content united by it, on the other.”99
Above we discussed the point that, for Tillich, the life process is a universal phenomenon—“the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process.” Since the first function of life, self-integration—through which self-identity is established and centeredness is actualized—is a function of all life processes, it follows that centeredness is also a universal phenomenon. “It appears in the microcosmic as well as in the macrocosmic dimension of the inorganic realm, and it appears in the realm of our ordinary encounter with inorganic objects. It appears in atom and star, in molecule and crystal,” Tillich writes. “This gives to every star as well as to every atom and crystal a kind of individuality.” The concept of life is, for Tillich, pervasive—and thus the criteria of distinctions in grade are as well. The atom and the star are both centered entities, and both unite a certain amount of content—though the star is no less centered than the atom, it certainly unites far more content. This is not simply a matter of the amount of substance contained in each entity, either, for we must remember that substance is resolved into function. Hence, the number, extension, and time of the various functions actualized in the life of a star are far more encompassing than in the atom. On the other hand, however, it is difficult to say that the star has a higher ontological grade than the atom, for the content united remains entirely in the inorganic realm (so far as we know).

In contrast, those entities that actualize progressively more realms in their life processes realize progressively more complex ontological grades. Hence, Tillich writes, “man is the highest being because his center is definite and the structure of its content is all-embracing.” In having a world, the human being becomes the center of “the structured unity of all possible content”—indeed, this is precisely what it means to have a
world rather than merely an environment.102 This is due to self-awareness, and in particular reflexive self-awareness, by which the self makes itself the object of its own consciousness and cognition. We discussed this above with regard to the realm of spirit, where we saw that the self can transcend itself in cognition by making the centering act of the self an object of its own cognition in reflexively self-aware projection. In other words, the human being is the most sharply centered of entities because it brings second-order self-awareness into the content of its own world in a centering act of self-transcendence, even if it does not do so self-consciously. Here, the self is centered “as the point to which all contents of awareness are related”—even the awareness of being a self.103

The human being, in actualizing its potentiality for reflexive self-awareness, not only is centered but takes the centering act into itself in freedom and responsibility as existential self-creation. More, the human being has, “face to face with one’s self, a world to which one, at the same time, belongs as a part.” The world with which one is “face to face” constitutes “a structured whole of infinite potentialities and actualities.”104 As such the human being is, ontologically, both the most sharply centered of entities and unites the greatest amount of content. The human being brings into its centering act all realms and dimensions of life, from the inorganic to the spiritual and historical. Hence the human is of the maximum ontological grade of life (excluding, of course, the divine life)—but it is not necessarily the most perfect: “Perfection means actualization of one’s potentialities; therefore, a lower being can be more perfect than a higher one if it is actually what it is potentially—at least in a high approximation. And the highest being—man—can become less perfect than any other, because he not only can fail to actualize
his essential being but can deny and distort it.\textsuperscript{105} An atom, star, cat, or alga can actualize its constitutive potentialities to a more complete degree than an individual human being—and hence be a more perfect example of the thing it is—without upsetting Tillich’s theory of grades.

Furthermore, Taylor’s claim that the good of every living entity, described in terms of well-being and the development of powers, finds theoretical grounding in Tillich’s ontology of life. (It is also taken further, in that Tillich’s \textit{Gestalten} extend his theory beyond what is classically and conventionally considered life—organic entities—to make life a universal phenomenon.) Couched in terms of Tillich’s ontology, Taylor’s “development of powers” can easily—and without doing violence to the intent of either theoretical vocabulary—be translated “actualization of potentialities.” More, this translation allows us to begin to bridge the gap between the language of analytical environmental ethics and the language of Tillich’s existential, ontological theology. For the divine life is God’s self-manifestation in and through creation—or, structured being is the self-manifestation of being-itself in and through the processes of life. If each life process is a particular mode of that divine self-manifestation, then the goodness of creation and the various creatures is given theological weight. The good of each of these life processes carries its own intrinsic value as an expression of the divine life, entirely independent of the instrumental value it may bear for human interests, the greater ontological grade of human life notwithstanding.

Then again, we need not say on that basis that each entity has the same moral standing, or the same degree of intrinsic value—indeed it is precisely the significance of Tillich’s theory of grades that this is denied. Rather, each entity has intrinsic value, and
has it for the same reason—because each is an instance of life and thus has a good of its own. Yet some entities actualize more potentiality than others. Hence, Tillich’s ontological ground for distinguishing between the grades of value of entities does not run afoul of Taylor’s accusation that the preeminent position of the human being is arbitrary. It is not the case that Tillich places human beings at the highest grade of being and value among finite beings because human beings possess some one attribute that humans prize on the grounds of human interests—instead, human beings actualize potentialities characteristic of all dimensions and realms of being.

That point cannot be forgotten, but neither can it be taken too simplistically. One must approach the theory of grades with a nuanced view of the intricacies of life in ecological terms, especially in terms of biodiversity and integration and interdependence of functions. A pragmatic consideration can help illustrate the sort of caution one must take in applying this theoretical perspective. Taylor reminds us of an important ecological consideration in his essay:

The possibility of the extinction of the human species, a possibility which starkly confronts us in the contemporary world, makes us aware of another respect in which we should not consider ourselves privileged beings in relation to other species. This is the fact that the well-being of humans is dependent upon the ecological soundness and health of many plant and animal communities, while their soundness and health does not in the least depend upon human well-being. Indeed, from their standpoint the very existence of humans is quite unnecessary. Every last man, woman, and child could disappear from the face of the earth without any significant detrimental consequences for the good of wild animals and plants. On the contrary, most of them would be greatly benefited. . . . not only would the Earth’s community of life continue to exist, but in all probability its well-being would be enhanced.  

That is not the case, of course, for such simple organisms as bacteria and phytoplankton, organisms which are of a very “low” ontological grade. Such organisms are essential factors for the cycling of carbon and other necessary nutrients from unusable to usable
forms, soil-formation, and the maintenance of the atmospheric balance necessary for life on Earth. For example, a single species of phytoplankton, diatoms, “are abundant in aquatic habitats, forming an essential part of many food chains,” make a “huge contribution to the global carbon economy,” and “give us every fifth breath, by the oxygen they liberate during photosynthesis.”

Were these biologically and ontologically simple organisms to disappear from the face of the Earth, it would certainly not be without any significant detrimental consequences for the good of the Earth’s community of life.

Such considerations encourage a nuanced balancing in reflecting on the degrees of value we can connect to ontological grades. As individuals, in terms of the development of powers or the actualization of potentialities, any particular human being will possess the capacity to actualize more dimensions than any particular phytoplankton. The species as such will further be determined by that characteristic. Love, art, abstract thought… all of these and more are forever beyond the reach of a single-celled organism. As such, the individual human being can be said to possess greater intrinsic value than any individual phytoplankton, on the basis of his or her greater ontological grade—that is, there is far more potentiality to be actualized, and potentialities characteristic of more developed and more complex ontological dimensions. Indeed, it may be that an individual human being possesses more value than any number of phytoplankton less than the number that would severely disrupt the functioning of the life process as such. But no individual human life justifies the extinction of an entire species upon which the very life process of the Earth itself depends. In fact, from a life-centered perspective, phytoplankton as a class may be more important than the human race—especially since
life as a whole, as process, *is* the actualization of potentiality *as such*. This is the meaning of the symbol, “divine life.” Though all instances of life have their own good—actualize their own proper potentiality—and thus all possess intrinsic value, they do not all possess it in equivalent degrees or ways.

Tillich’s ontology of life allows us to nuance Primavesi’s and Taylor’s claims of species impartiality without negating the significance of their claims that all beings alike possess intrinsic value, but his theory is not without its own problems. First, maintaining the language of human beings as the “highest beings”—even while he rejects that language in ontological metaphor—preserves the risk of re-inscribing the problematic ontological anthropocentrism we discussed above. It would be far too easy to reject the model of hierarchy in ontological metaphor while maintaining the tendency to allow purely human, instrumental concerns to dominate moral considerations. This is precisely what deep ecology and Gaian theology must seek to correct. While we cannot give each individual bacteria the same moral claim as each individual human, neither can we make the ethical claims of nonhuman organisms depend on human concerns.

More importantly for our concern is Tillich’s tendency to limit the second criterion for ontological grades—the amount of content united by the centering act—to the human scale. When we consider the degree to which the human world is “infinitely encompassing” in theoretical terms that make Gaia a *Gestalt* in the relevant sense, we must at least consider the possibility that the content Gaia structurally unifies is *more* encompassing than the human. Of course, the human *Gestalt* is said to be infinitely encompassing because the human has a *world*, and having a world is made possible by the centering act of reflexive self-awareness whereby the self brings itself into the
centering act as an element in its own world. It could be claimed that Gaia, no matter what else we might claim for her, is not self-aware in the relevant way—but the question has not yet been properly asked! If it were the case that Gaia could be said to possess such self-awareness, then that awareness too would be more fully encompassing—and if the center were more definite, as well…

This question will be asked in the third part of the dissertation, where we consider Gaia properly, but it had to be raised here as a possibility. At this point, however, we must turn to the divine life ontologically defined, and especially to the idea of dual participation. These considerations will lead into Chapter III, where we will discuss the panentheist nature of Tillich’s theology. Before that, though, we will also briefly consider the symbolic function of our guiding symbol, the “divine life.”

**The Divine Life**

“Life is the process in which potential being becomes actual being. It is the actualization of the structural elements of being in their unity and tension.”\(^{108}\) We have claimed that this process of life is—ontologically—the self-manifestation of being-itself, and—symbolically—the divine life. It remains here only to draw out the ontologically relevant distinctions between organic life and the divine life. The distinctions are not clear, though, because the divine life lives in and through the life process, structured according to the ontological elements. Thus, any statement about the life process points symbolically “to a quality of the divine life which is analogous to what appears as dynamics in the ontological structure.”\(^{109}\) In the divine life, God is said to both ground and self-manifest in and through the process of going-out-beyond-and-return that is
characteristic of life as such. This, in fact, is precisely how self-manifestation is to be understood. That is, the symbol, God’s creativity, is understood ontologically according to the method of correlation in terms of being-itself giving form to the power of being in and through its self-actualization in structured being.

Yet we must be careful in employing such language on two counts. On the one hand, we must always keep in mind that the term God marks the boundary at which all language becomes symbolic, and thus any discussion of the divine life will move between the symbolic and the conceptual. On the other hand, we need to keep in mind that being-itself is not subject to limitation in the same way that beings are. (In symbolic language, we could perhaps say that the divine life is not subject to death.) The self-manifestation of being-itself is symbolized as the living self-transcendence of the divine life, analogous to the self-transcendence of the finite being in the process of existential self-awareness and projection, described above. The self-manifestation of being-itself, however, is actualized by being bringing nonbeing into itself as an active ontological principle, while eternally overcoming it, always rooted in the primordial unity of being-itself. In this sense the divine is always transcendent to its creation: “The polar character of the ontological elements is rooted in the divine life, but the divine life is not subject to this polarity,” Tillich writes. “Within the divine life, every ontological element includes its polar element completely,” such that God is “the ultimacy in which the polarities of being disappear in the ground of being.”110 In contrast, finite life is subject to distortion because the polar elements are unbalanced and in tension.

Hence, Tillich can maintain that “God is life as Spirit,” where Spirit is defined as “the ultimate unity of power and meaning.”111 Still, the divine life is symbolically
analogous to life as such, and thus Tillich separates out “moments within the divine life” that can be read as analogous to the elements of life described above in section C.3., “The Dialectical Dynamic of Life”—self-identity, self-alteration, and return. These moments, which frame Tillich’s understanding of the symbol of the Trinity, Tillich calls the abyss, the *logos*, and the Spirit.

The first moment within the divine life, the “abyss of the divine,” is the Godhead—“that which makes God God.” Here the existential formula is reversed: where Heidegger said that searching for the ground of being we find an abyss, in response to the element of power in God we find that the abyss is the ground, “the inexhaustible ground of being in which everything has its origin. It is the power of being infinitely resisting nonbeing, giving the power of being to everything that is.”\(^\text{112}\) The abyss of the divine finds its analogous expression in finite life in self-identity, characteristic of the function of self-integration and of centeredness.

The second moment of the divine life, the *logos*, is the meaning and structure of being, the “principle of God’s self-objectivation.” In this moment the abyssal divine ground makes itself definite in its fullness by becoming finite, limited—that is, by expressing itself in and through finite beings in the divinely-empowered process of life as its own self-manifestation. It is this self-limitation that makes the ground of being truly “creative ground.”\(^\text{113}\) This second moment finds its analogous expression in the element of self-alteration, characteristic of the function of self-creation and of growth.

The third moment of the divine life, the Spirit, is “the actualization of the other two principles,” uniting and containing the power and meaning (structure) of being in complimentary, balanced, reciprocal dialectics. In the Spirit, God “goes out from” God’s
self—the spirit “proceeds from the divine ground,” manifests in creation, and lives as that which is both separated and unified. This third moment finds its analogous expression in the element of return, characteristic of the function of self-transcendence and the source of the human experience of the sacred.

Thus is the ontological description of life linked to the symbol of the divine life. The divine life, the symbol correlating to the ontological concept of being-itself self-manifesting in and through structured being, also names the religious insight that God is that in which “we live and move and have our being.” All beings that live—and for Tillich, all entities partake of the process characteristic of the ontological understanding of life—live in and through and as a part of the divine life. This is correlated to the ontological expression that the power of being eternally resisting nonbeing is the dialectical process giving the power to be to everything that is.

**Dual Participation**

We here introduce the concept of dual participation to label the force of Tillich’s claim that “God himself is said to participate in the negativities of creaturely existence” because “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.” These ideas are familiar from the exhaustive ontological analysis above, and need not be further explicated. The import here is simple. “Dual participation” names the following ontological concept: Finite being participates in the self-manifestation of being-itself because being-itself participates in finite being as its generating and empowering ground. This can more easily be stated symbolically. *The*
*divine life participates in finite life* as the creative power of being of finite life. *Finite life participates in the divine life* as a particular instance of its self-manifestation, self-creation, and self-transcendence.

Again, this is the force of Tillich’s assertion that as “the creative ground of everything that has being”—as “the infinite and unconditional power of being”—“God is neither alongside things nor even ‘above’ them; he is nearer to them than they are to themselves.”¹¹⁷ We saw this way of thinking already in our discussion of the infinite/finite distinction, according to which the infinite and the finite do not constitute a polarity; rather, the infinite includes the finite within it. Moreover, in the incorporation of the finite into the infinite, an awareness of the infinite is generated within finite being. Infinity enters finite consciousness as an experience of the mind’s unlimited potentiality as well as an awareness of the determining limits of finitude. Here, then, is an important point of contact between human consciousness and the divine—a point of which Tillich makes much. Certainly, the experience of the unlimited potentiality of the human imagination together with the infinitely retreating horizon of intelligibility can be fruitfully read as the existential import of the ontological proof, as presented by both St. Anselm of Canterbury and René Descartes. Far from establishing the existence of “an infinite being” (a nonsensical concept in any case) the ontological proof points to the appearance and participation of the infinite within finite existence—within consciousness. Just so, the awareness of infinity within the finite marks the participation of finite existence in the divine life, as a moment and as a re-instantiation of the dynamic going out beyond and returning to the self.
Finally, it is of extreme importance for the discussion of the ontological and theological development of the concept “Nature” that our existential awareness of the infinite within finitude points us to finding God—or at least traces of God—in the world. This, as we will discuss in the next chapter, in no way simply equates “God” and “nature.” Rather, the retreating horizon of intelligibility marks not only the dual infinity and limitation of the human mind; it also reveals the infinite quality of the structure of being insofar as that structure is the self-manifestation of being-itself. In any case, it is important to note the concept of dual participation in regards to the divine life, for it is through that participation that both God and organic life live.

Symbolic Function

The central claim resulting from Tillich’s method of correlation—indeed, the axis of his entire system—is the assertion that “God is being-itself.” This correlates the symbol “God” with the concept “being-itself” in a productive tension, and the statement itself denotes the boundary line at which symbolic and non-symbolic language coincide. Anything that can be said about the divine is a symbolic answer to the question involved in philosophical reflection, as well as a response to the ultimate reality about which philosophy inquires and to which religion speaks. The symbol “divine life” thus speaks to an experienced reality that can be correlated to ontological structures discovered in critical reflection—but it also points beyond these structures to the out-flowing, overflowing nature of the depth and power of being. It is this to which religion responds symbolically, and it does so in terms of the only language available to us, taken from
finite experience. So our religious use of symbol captures our response to that of which we are always already aware but resists conceptual capture.

Thus, in Chapter I, we pointed to the theoretical imprecision of our recurring term “self-manifestation” as an ontological concept. For being-itself to “have a self”—as is linguistically implied in “self-manifestation”—entails that being-itself is subject to the self-world structure. That structure, however, is a structure of finitude, and thus being-itself would be brought into finitude rather than be the ground of finite being, which the system cannot abide. This quite clearly illustrates the nature of the use of terms at the boundary, for there seems no better term than self-manifestation to articulate what is meant in the above analysis; we are compelled to use the term, and to use it in an ontological sense, its imprecision and its symbolic nature notwithstanding. Such is the operation of the method of correlation.

We therefore recognize that the dynamic out-flowing, over-flowing nature of the depth and power of being is best spoken in symbolic language, even (or especially) where it is correlated to the third term of the power-of-being/nonbeing dialectic. This third term, alternately named self-manifestation and structure of being, speaks to the structural unfolding of being instantiated in the functions and elements of life. Thus we name it “divine life” in full awareness that the symbol points not only to this dialectical process but also beyond the dialectical structure to the depth, ground, and abyss of being that makes the structural manifestation of being-itself a unity primordially to its self-alteration and return. That is, the divine life, described in terms of the triune moments of the divine life—Godhead, logos, and Spirit—speaks of the divine in a symbol correlated to the language of the ontology of life.
How, then, does our guiding symbol function? Tillich describes six characteristics of any symbol. It will prove instructive to consider the divine life in relation to each. (1) Symbols “point beyond themselves to something else.” (2) A symbol “participates in that to which it points.” (3) A symbol “opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us.” (4) A symbol “not only opens up dimensions and elements of reality which otherwise would remain unapproachable but also unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality.” (5) Symbols “cannot be produced intentionally . . . They grow out of the individual and collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being.” (6) Finally, symbols, like living beings, “grow and die.”

The foundational symbol, Tillich maintains, is God: “God is a symbol for God. This means that 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.” Whether we call it concern for the ultimate or awareness of infinity in the finite, the result is the same—we respond to the experience of immanent transcendence and name it “God.” When we speak of God, then, we speak symbolically. “All the qualities we attribute to him, power, love, and justice, are taken from finite experience and applied symbolically to that which is beyond finitude and infinity.” Just so, when we say “God is a living God” we apply symbolically the functions and elements of life to the dynamic process of the self-manifestation of being-itself and call it
the “divine life.” With this in mind, it is a simple task to unpack the symbol under the headings of Tillich’s six characteristics of symbols.

The symbol “divine life” points beyond itself in the very way we just now discussed. The image of the “living God,” a consistent biblical theme, uses features of finite life—in this case the growing, creative, out-flowing and overflowing nature of life—and applies them to the question of being in such a way as to point to the self-manifestation of being itself in and through structured being. The symbol participates in that to which it points insofar as living instances of that manifestation use elements of their own experience of what it is to be alive to understand the life process as such and the self-creating nature of being in which they participate directly. Their participation in the self-creation of being is precisely the source of their power to be. Furthermore, as Tillich’s doctrine of the moments of the divine life suggests, in the life process itself the ground and power of being returns to itself in and through its self-manifestation in an act of self-realization through the symbolic (religious) consciousness of life.

The symbol opens new levels of reality to us in the way that it shows life to be an attribute not only of individual organisms but a name for the entire process of the self-manifestation of being itself. Life is recognized as a universal phenomenon, belonging not only to ourselves and to organisms like us but also to stars, atoms, and rocks… to the entire universal process of structured being, grounded in and empowered by the depth of being, being itself or God. The symbol opens dimensions of the soul in that very same revelation, showing us our deep, ontological and existential belonging to that universal process. At the root of the individual’s existence, marked off by estrangement,
separation, and death, is the God who is the *living* God, that in whom we live and move and have our being.

Of course the biblical allusion points to the fact that the symbol is not produced—least of all here—but has grown out of the spiritual experience of the tradition. This point requires no particularly existential interpretation apart from that provided by Tillich regarding symbols generally. The “divine life” is hardly a new symbol. The idea of the tribal god of the Hebrews who became the God of universal creation, who is active in each individual and in the sweep of history alike, speaks to Tillich’s panentheistic understanding still. The symbol has clearly grown, therefore. That the idea of the living God taps into perennial existential concerns is proven by its continued relevance on the far side of the demythologizing project of Bultmann and Tillich. The symbol may die someday, but it has not died yet. This means that we need not indulge in reductive interpretations of religion and theology in the process of demythologizing and “ecologizing” theology. The symbol of the divine life remains relevant to panentheist theology as well as to religious naturalism, allowing us to connect a Gaian consciousness to the tradition from which and within which the symbol grew.
Notes


4. Ibid., xii.

5. Ibid., xvii.


7. Ibid., 1:238.

8. Ibid., 1:189.

9. Ibid., 1:190.

10. Ibid., 1:191.

11. Ibid.


15. Ibid., 1.263.


17. Ibid., 3:12.

18. Ibid., 2:29.


21. Ibid., 3:12.

22. Ibid.


25. Ibid., 1:202-03.
27 Ibid., 525.
28 Ibid., 527.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 128.
32. Ibid., 529-31.
33. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:256.
34. Ibid., 3:30.
35. Ibid., 3:13.
36. Ibid.
37. Anne Primavesi, Sacred Gaia, 125.
38. Ibid., 131.
40. Anne Primavesi, Sacred Gaia, 126.
42. Ibid., 3:14-15.
43. Ibid., 3:15.
44. Ibid.
45. Anne Primavesi, Sacred Gaia, 126.
47. Ibid., 1:202-203.
48. Ibid., 3:16.
49. Ibid., 3:17.
50. Ibid., 3:18.


52. Ibid., 9.

53. Ibid., 3-4.

54. Ibid., 5.

55. Ibid., 8-9.

56. Ibid., 5.

57. Ibid., 11.

58. Ibid., 13.

59. Ibid., 9.

60. Ibid., 16.

61. Ibid., 14.

62. Ibid., 17.


65. Ibid., 22.


67. Ibid., 3:18.

68. Ibid., 3:19.

69. Ibid., 3:19-20.

70. Ibid., 3:12.

71. Ibid., 3:20.

72. Ibid., 3:21.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 3:21-22.
76. Ibid., 3:23.
77. Ibid., 3:24.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., 3:27.
81. Ibid., 3:30.
84. Ibid., 3:31.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., 3:33.
87. Ibid., 3:35.
88. Ibid., 3:32.
91. Ibid., 218.
92. Ibid., 213.
93. Ibid., 199-201.
97. Ibid., 3:20.
98. Ibid., 3:36.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid., 3:12.
101. Ibid., 3:34.
102. Ibid., 3:36.
103. Ibid., 3:37.
104. Ibid., 3:38.
105. Ibid., 3:36.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., 1:243-44.
111. Ibid., 1:250
112. Ibid., 1:250-51.
113. Ibid., 1:251.
114. Ibid.
117. Ibid., 2:7.
118. Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, 47-49.
119. Ibid., 53.
120. Ibid., 54.
CHAPTER III:
The Panentheistic Nature of the System

The principle of participation drives us one step further. God himself is said to participate in the negativities of creaturely existence. This idea is supported by mystical as well as christological thought. Nevertheless, the idea must be stated with reservations. Genuine patripassianism (the doctrine that God the Father has suffered in Christ) rightly was rejected by the early church. 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 is based on the certainty of God as the creative ground of being and meaning. The confidence of every creature, its courage to be, is rooted in faith in God as its creative ground.

Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume One

Classical Theism, Pantheism, and Panentheism

Perhaps the most useful definition of panentheism the author has found comes from David H. Nikkel’s “creative synthesis” of the panentheisms of Charles Hartshorne and Paul Tillich:

Panentheism literally means “all in God.” . . . It holds that the nondivine individuals are included in God, are fully within the divine life. God knows all that exists without externality, mediation, or loss (though God’s knowledge and valuation are more than the creaturely experiences that are wholly included in the divine experience). God empowers all that exists without externality or mediation (though there is genuine indeterminacy and freedom of choice and action which God empowers in the creaturely realm). This is in contrast to traditional theism, which has tended to regard God as utterly distinct from the creation and the creatures. Deism is an extreme of this tendency. On the other hand, panentheism also distinguishes itself from pantheism . . . It holds that God is not reducible to the nondivine individuals, to the universe as a whole, or to the structure of the universe; but rather god transcends them, having a reality—an awareness and power—that includes but is not exhausted by the reality of the creation and the experiences and actions of the creatures.¹

In this final chapter of Part One we will consider how it is that Tillich’s system fits this definition. We will see that Tillich rejects the externality of God, that God empowers all
that is without externality or mediation, and also that God transcends both separation and reduction. In the end of the chapter we will return to Nikkel’s challenge to Tillich’s panentheism regarding the impassibility of God and the freedom of the creature to see if Tillich’s system can be interpreted as overcoming that challenge. First, however, we will discuss the terms at stake—classical (or traditional) theism, pantheism, and panentheism—along with Tillich’s rejection of both classical theism and pantheism, and detail precisely the ways in which Tillich can be called a panentheist.

Tillich often and for very good systematic reasons rejects classical theism and pantheism; he has been called a panentheist by more than one author, though he directly uses the term “pan-en-theism” in reference to his own thought on only one occasion at the very end of his three-volume Systematic Theology.² From what has been said in the two preceding chapters concerning the finite and the infinite, dual participation, and the divine life, however, the panentheistic elements of his thought should be evident. In fact, the panentheistic nature of Tillich’s thought can be understood as one instance of a turn to panentheism within a much broader revival of panentheism in twentieth-century theology, a trend that Michael W. Brierley calls nothing less than a “doctrinal revolution.” He continues, “The ‘revolution’ is not ‘small-scale,’ because panentheism subverts the priorities of classical theism, and thereby undercuts its edifice and structure. It challenges classical theism’s imperium, and places the doctrine of God in ferment.”³

Why, though, does the panentheistic revolution seek to undercut the priorities of classical theism? This question asks after the impetus of developing theology in a panentheistic direction—and the motive for moving in a panentheistic direction generally is a motive Tillich shares. As Arthur Peacocke notes, the theological motives
of panentheism point to “the need to accentuate, in the light of contemporary knowledge of the world and of humanity, a much stronger sense than in the past of the immanence of God as in some sense ‘in’ the world.” Moreover, for a theologian of a panentheistic bent, God’s immanence must be accentuated in such a way as to avoid “demeaning from or qualifying God’s ultimate transcendence, God’s ontological ultimate ‘otherness.’”

Clearly, Tillich seeks to do precisely this, to speak to the “God above the God of theism” without slipping into pantheism. That is especially clear in Tillich’s language of participation, which we discussed at length above. For Tillich, God is both radically immanent—through the doctrine of dual participation—and also radically transcendent, a markedly panentheist perspective:

God would not be God if he were not the creative ground of everything that has being . . . in fact, he is the infinite and unconditional power of being or, in the most radical abstraction, that he is being-itself. In this respect God is neither alongside things nor even “above” them; he is nearer to them than they are to themselves. He is their creative ground, here and now, always and everywhere.

That, of course, speaks to the immanence of God: God as the creative ground of being participates in all being, for structured, finite being only is in so far as the power of being manifests in and through it. Yet God’s transcendence must also be affirmed:

God as the ground of being infinitely transcends that of which he is the ground. He stands against the world, in so far as the world stands against him, and he stands for the world, thereby causing the world to stand for him. This mutual freedom from each other and for each other is the only meaningful sense in which the “supra” in “supranaturalism” can be used. Only in this sense can we speak of “transcendent” with respect to the relation of God and the world. To call God transcendent in this sense does not mean that one must establish a “superworld” of divine objects. It does mean that, within itself, the finite world points beyond itself. In other words, it is self-transcendent.

Thus, though Tillich does not here use the term panentheism, he is clearly speaking to the panentheistic impulse to affirm both God’s transcendence and God’s immanence.
Again, in speaking to the motivation of panentheistic theology, Peacocke speaks in terms of the dynamic nature of life, a key theme we developed at length in the previous chapter. “Indeed, the scientific perspective of the world, especially the living world, inexorably impresses upon us a dynamic picture of the world of entities, structures, and processes involved in continuous and incessant change and in process without ceasing. This has impelled many to reintroduce a dynamic element into their understanding of God’s creative relation to the world.” For Tillich, the picture of the divine life is a picture of ongoing creation made possible by a dialectical movement in God’s self-relation, conceptualized in terms of the three moments of the divine life analogous to the functions and elements of organic life. Creation is God’s dynamical, dialectical self-manifestation in, through, and to structured being—this points to the immanence of God in Tillich’s system. Yet as the ground of the eternal structure of being, as the primordial unity of the ontological elements constituting that structure, God is eternal and unchanging—this points to the transcendence of God in Tillich’s system.

Tillich is therefore, at least on the surface, quite clearly panentheistic in tendency if not in all particulars. In fact, however, we will show that he is panentheistic in the particulars as well. Yet Brierley identifies no fewer than thirty-five twentieth century thinkers who explicitly self-identify as panentheists or as process theists, “a subset of panentheism.” In addition, he names at least twenty-nine nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers who have been identified by others as panentheists (whether for good reasons or bad). Paul Tillich appears on this second list. Finally, Brierley names medieval theologians including Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa panentheists. Figures as diverse as David Ray Griffin, Sallie McFague, Peter Berger, Martin Buber,
Martin Heidegger, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and G. W F. Hegel appear on the lists. Clearly not all of these agree on what the word “God” means. Hence it is incumbent upon us neither to defend nor contest any of the other identifications Brierely makes but to clarify precisely in what way Tillich’s thought can be named panentheistic.

Our purpose in this chapter, therefore, is to more explicitly identify Tillich as a panentheist in terms of some distinguishing factors of panentheism generally, and to show precisely how each can be understood in terms of his system. That task will involve, first, understanding the difference between pantheism and panentheism, specifically in terms of Tillich’s rejection of the former and his understanding of the “in” that distinguishes the latter. Second, we will discuss Tillich’s panentheism directly in terms of the eight common facets of panentheist language identified by Michael W. Brierley. This will involve a somewhat lengthy detour through a discussion of Tillich’s Christology for it is Brierly’s claim that panentheism involves degree Christology. We will suggest that Tillich’s understanding of Jesus as the Christ, though complex, can indeed be fit into that category, broadly conceived. Third, we will consider some pressing issues for Tillich’s panentheism, especially in terms of David H. Nikkel’s claim that “Tillich’s God cannot very convincingly be called the living God” because “as far as divine happiness and experience of value are concerned, God is closed, fixed, static, rather than in living relation with creation.”8 This criticism seems to threaten our analysis of the divine life and it will need to be considered. Finally, we will briefly look to the relation of panentheism generally—and Tillich’s panentheism specifically—to religious naturalism in preparation for Part Two.
A Brief Discussion of the Terms

The terms pantheism and panentheism are clearly related—indeed, the primary difference between the two hinges on the “-en-” in the second. Hence it will be worthwhile to briefly discuss the two terms to distinguish them and to contextualize them. We will consider the meaning of the term “pantheism” first, and while we will detail Tillich’s ontological rejection of theism and pantheism in the next section, we will briefly note a few points concerning Tillich’s system as it relates to what is said here. We will then discuss panentheism, with an eye to definition and history, for the purpose of laying the ground for the remainder of the chapter.

According to Michael Levine, “The book recognized as containing the most complete attempt at explaining and defending pantheism from a philosophical perspective is Spinoza's *Ethics*, finished in 1675 two years before his death.” The term itself was likely coined 1720 by John Toland, who “used it as a synonym for ‘Spinozist.’” Levine offers three possible definitions of pantheism, two from H. P. Owen’s 1971 *Concepts of Deity* and one from Alastair MacIntyre’s entry on “Pantheism” in the 1967 *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Owen’s definitions are, (1) that “God is everything and everything is God … the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature,” and (2) “that every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it.” For his part, MacIntyre defines pantheism as “the view that everything that exists constitutes a ‘unity’ and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine.”
Elements of each of those three definitions are consistent with Tillich’s thought. While Tillich vehemently denies that the world is identical with God, our analysis has consistently maintained that finite being is in fact a self-expression of God. (We must bear the subtle difference between those two understandings in mind.) Just so, while Tillich would deny that God is a being, and thus would reject Owen’s locution “every existing entity is only one Being,” there does seem to be a sort of affinity between Owen’s language and Tillich’s here. Finally, MacIntyre’s gesture to an all-inclusive unity certainly sounds like the Tillichian claim that being-itself can be understood in terms of the primordial ground that provides the unity of the structure of being. Yet in each of these there are reasons for Tillich to move away from pantheism to a panentheistic expression of his system, hinging on precisely the language of unity and existence. In the next section we will deal more fully with Tillich’s rejection of pantheism, but a bit more remains to be said here.

It is the drive to deny the ontological limitation of God according to which classical theism makes God a being—albeit the highest being—as well as the pantheistic reaction that denies the transcendence of God along with its denial of the ontological error of classical theism that motivates the middle path of panentheism. Early forms of panentheism have been identified in Egyptian mythology and Indian Vedantic thought. It has been found in the medieval Christian thought of Meister Ekhart and Nicholas of Cusa as well. John Culp notes that although these thinkers were “accused of pantheism by their contemporaries,” in fact “their systems can be identified as panentheistic because they understood God in various ways as including the world rather than being the world and because they used a dialectical method. The dialectical method involved the
generation of opposites and then the reconciliation of the opposition in God. This retained
the distinct identity of God in God's influence of the world.” Spinoza, as we have seen,
gave voice to these concerns philosophically but, to the panentheist way of thinking,
over-reached.

It was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, that the conscious
development of panentheism began in earnest, especially with the likes of Schelling and
Hegel. “Schelling and Hegel sought to retain the close relationship between God and the
world that Spinoza proposed without identifying God with the world,” Culp reports.
“Our concept of God as developing in and through the world provided the means for
accomplishing this.” Tillich wrote two dissertations on Schelling—his thought was
obviously influenced by this position. Hegel was also influential on Tillich’s thought in
ways we have already seen: “Hegel understood the infinite as including the finite by
absorbing the finite into its own fuller nature. This retained divine transcendence in the
sense of the divine surpassing its parts although not separate from the parts.” Indeed,
Tillich’s presentation of the modes of the divine life follows Hegel closely. In the
twentieth century panentheism exploded, presented in various forms through the work of
not only Tillich but process philosophers and theologians such as Alfred North
Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, and John Cobb. As such, we turn
now to our more direct discussion of Tillich’s panentheism.

*Tillich’s Ontological Rejection of Classical Theism and Pantheism*

Tillich rejects pantheism on the grounds that it under-emphasizes—or, indeed,
logically precludes—God’s transcendence. The language of “self-manifestation” that has
been central to our analysis of Tillich’s understanding of the divine life points to this. While pantheism binds God to the elements of finite being and thus renders God finite, symbolic language such as self-manifestation and divine life points to the idea that being-itself is actualized in and through finite being while remaining transcendent as the ground of the structure of being. Tillich also rejects pantheism for reasons similar to those motivating his rejection of classical theism: both, he claims, imagine God to exist, thus, again, rendering God finite and subject to the structure of being. In this section we will consider Tillich’s rejection of classical theism and pantheism from this ontological viewpoint for the purpose of introducing the impulse motivating Tillich’s panentheism as a via media between the rejected extremes. According to Michael W. Brierley, in fact “At every stage of its entry into modern theology panentheism has represented a middle path between two extremes, and so it has explicitly become one of the three essential types of the most fundamental of doctrines, the doctrine of God. Classical theism, pantheism, and panentheism are recognized as the basic patterns through which the doctrine of God can be analyzed.”

**Classical Theism**

The reception of Tillich’s famous formulation of “the God above the God of theism” during the “new reformation” of the 1960s has been criticized by Russel Re Manning as “hopelessly naïve and frankly embarrassing,” “like so much teenage existentialism.” Manning notes, however, that the reception of Tillich in a naïve age does not negate the fact that Tillich’s thought is more nuanced and complex than any teenage existentialism allows. In this instance, Tillich’s pursuit of the “God above God”
must be read in the light of his statement that “God is a symbol for God,” expressed in his *Dynamics of Faith*: “It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. In no other way can faith express itself adequately.” As we noted above, we apply the language of concrete experience to the immediate experience of ultimacy, which can be expressed only symbolically. In so doing, however, we are applying the language of finitude to that which is beyond not only all finitude but even the finite-infinite duality in the self-manifestation characteristic of the divine life. This runs the risk of idolatry, making the symbol replace that which is symbolized, and leads to the classic but misleading arguments concerning the “existence of God,” for by definition that which exists is finite.

And it is that point which is at the root of Tillich’s rejection of the first of the three essential types of fundamental doctrines, classical theism. Theism in the “strictly theological” sense “tries to prove the necessity of affirming God in some way; it usually develops the so-called arguments for the ‘existence of God.’” As we discussed in Chapter I, however, to exist is to be, and to be means to unite a concept and a percept, making the existing thing a thing and the thing that it is. By the mere fact that a thing is, it stands out of absolute nonbeing. By the fact that it is the thing that it is, it stands out of relative nonbeing as a mixture of being and nonbeing, as everything finite does; it stands out of the whole of things as the thing that it is; it stands out of potentiality into actuality—and on all of these counts to exist is to be finite, to be a thing in the world. “However it is defined,” though, “the ‘existence of God’ contradicts the idea of a creative ground of essence and existence. The ground of being cannot be found within the totality of beings.” As such, “God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and
existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him.” Tillich phrases the same point further on in this way, bringing together transcendence and imminence in a characteristically panentheistic manner:

God is being-itself, not a being. On this basis a first step can be taken toward the solution of the problem which usually is discussed as the immanence and the transcendence of God. As the power of being, God transcends every being and also the totality of beings—the world. Being-itself is beyond finitude and infinity; otherwise it would be conditioned by something other than itself, and the real power of being would lie beyond both it and that which conditioned it. Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite “jump.” On the other hand, everything finite participates in being-itself and in its infinity. Otherwise it would not have the power of being. It would be swallowed by nonbeing, or it would never have emerged out of nonbeing. This double relation of all beings to being-itself gives being-itself a double characteristic. In calling it creative, we point to the fact that everything participates in the infinite power of being. In calling it abysmal, we point to the fact that everything participates in the power of being in a finite way, that all beings are infinitely transcended by their creative ground.

The final points in this quote nuance what we have called dual participation in a particularly important way. We participate in the divine life as a particular manifestation of the power of being because the power of being flows through us as our power to be, but our participation is always finite. The power to be eternally and absolutely overcomes nonbeing, but in finite being that overcoming is always limited, partial. Thus does being-itself transcend that in and through which it manifests.

The essential point for our current purpose, however, is that the arguments purporting to prove the existence of God—characteristic of classical theism in its strictly theological sense, as Tillich presents it—can do no such thing, for the very term “existence of God” is a category error and an absurdity. Instead, what these arguments do effectively show is the necessity of the question of God. The ontological arguments for the existence of God—those arguments that seek to prove the necessary existence of
God \textit{a priori} from an examination of the concept—“are expressions of the \textit{question} of God which is implied in human finitude.” That is, they give us a “description of the way in which potential infinity is present in actual finitude,” an existential state that drives ontological questioning.\textsuperscript{21}

As an example, Tillich points to Chapter 2 of St. Anselm’s \textit{Proslogion}, where Anselm prays as follows: “And so, Lord, do you, who do give understanding to faith, give me, so far as you knowest it to be profitable, to understand that you are as we believe; and that you are that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.”\textsuperscript{22} Here we note that the language of “a being” succumbs to the category mistake detailed above, but again, the force of the argument cannot actually be to prove the existence of a being named “God.” Rather, according to Tillich, Anselm’s statement “that God is a necessary thought and that therefore this idea must have objective and therefore subjective reality is valid in so far as thinking, by its very nature, implies an unconditional element which transcends subjectivity and objectivity, that is, a point of identity which makes the idea of truth possible.”\textsuperscript{23} We discussed this idea in Chapter I, where we noted that for both Tillich and Heidegger the possibility of truth—which both see as the cognitive union of subject and object—depends upon the unity of subject and object in a primordial unity grounded in being-itself. Thus, since subject and object are primordially unified in their common ground in being-itself, and since both are expressions of the same power to be, thought depends upon that unity just as much as it depends upon the existential separation of subject and object—and it is this situation that the ontological argument expresses.
Descartes’ version of the argument makes this a central premise: “I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than there is in a finite one. Thus the perception of the infinite is somehow prior in me to my perception of the finite, that is, my perception of God is prior to my perception of myself.” Descartes reasons. “It is no objection that I do not comprehend the infinite or that there are countless other things in God that I can in no way either comprehend or perhaps even touch with my thought. For the nature of the infinite is such that it is not comprehended by a being such as I, who am finite.”24 Again, this formulation is open to a number of criticisms so long as the “supreme being” is imagined to be “a being,” just the biggest and best. Some of those criticisms may be valid, others may not. For Tillich it is Hegel’s formulation of the bad infinite—captured in Tillich’s assertion that God does not exist because God is being-itself, not a being—that undercuts the classical interpretation of the ontological argument that makes God a being, even if the supreme being. Yet Descartes is pointing to something that Tillich finds deeply important, the fact that finite being finds the infinite always already ingredient in its thought, and needs to explain that. This drives the need for human beings to ask the question of God, the question of infinity implied in the human experience of finding an awareness of the infinite in finite consciousness.

Just so, whereas the ontological argument expresses the necessity of asking the question of God implied in human finitude, the so-called cosmological arguments for the existence of God again reveal the necessity of asking the question of God. In this case the question is existential rather than ontological. “The question of God must be asked because the threat of nonbeing, which man experiences as anxiety, drives him to the question of being conquering nonbeing and of courage conquering anxiety.”25 The threat
of nonbeing drives the human being to seek necessary existence, the unconditional
overcoming of nonbeing which the human can never be:

From the endless chain of causes and effects [the cosmological argument] arrives
at the conclusion that there is a first cause, and from the contingency of all
substances it concludes that there is a necessary substance. But cause and
substance are categories of finitude. The “first cause” is a hypostasized question,
not a statement about a being which initiates the causal chain. Such a being
would itself be a part of the causal chain and would again raise the question of
cause. In the same way, a “necessary substance” is a hypostasized question, not a
statement about a being which gives substantiality to all substances. Such a being
would itself be a substance with accidents and would again open the question of
substantiality itself. When used as material for “arguments,” both categories lose
their categorical character. First cause and necessary substance are symbols
which express the question implied in finite being, the question of that which
transcends finitude and categories, the question of being—its embracing and
conquering nonbeing, the question of God. . . . Finite being is a question mark. It
asks the question of the “eternal now” in which the temporal and the spatial are
simultaneously accepted and overcome. It asks the question of the “ground of
being” in which the causal and the substantial are simultaneously confirmed and
negated.26

In both cases the existential and ontological questions converge on the question of God,
the ground of being that is the source of the courage to be, the existential courage that
overcomes anxiety, rooted in the power of being overcoming nonbeing.

Likewise, Tillich criticizes the archaic personalism of classical theism that “tries
to establish a doctrine of God which transforms the person-to-person encounter with God
into a doctrine about two persons who may or may not meet but who have a reality
independent of each other.”27 Of course Tillich does affirm a personal God, but not a
God who is a person. This is a difficult point, but it must be understood in terms of the
divine life and of divine transcendence, and it must be understood symbolically:

The symbol “personal God” is absolutely fundamental because an existential
relation is a person-to-person relation. Man cannot be ultimately concerned about
something that is less than personal, but since personality . . . includes
individuality, the question arises in what sense God can be called an individual.
Is it meaningful to call him the “absolute individual”? The answer must be that it
is meaningful only in the sense that he can be the “absolute participant.” [Here Tillich is referencing the first polarity of ontological elements, individualization and participation.] The one term cannot be used without the other. This can only mean that both individualization and participation are rooted in the ground of the divine life and that God is equally “near” to each of them while transcending them both. . . . “Personal God” does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person but he is not less than personal.\(^{28}\)

Thus for Tillich God is personal as the source of the ontological power that makes personality possible—the ontological elements of self and world, individualization and participation especially—but God is not a person.

Tillich claims that the doctrinal position that makes God into another person, a “heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind” really began only in the nineteenth century “in connection with the Kantian separation of nature ruled by physical law from personality ruled by moral law.”\(^{29}\) This may be true for systematic theologians such as Aquinas; an argument would need to be made that the less theologically educated populace did not imagine God as a divine being, a heavenly person. Certainly by the sixteenth century Michelangelo depicted God as a man with a beard reclining on a cloud, an influential image for the Christian imagination to this day.

In any case, however, Tillich’s point is that human beings respond in an existential way to the divine, and thus God cannot be less than personal. To make God a person, however, is again to make God subject to the conditions of finitude, to bring God wholly into existence:

He is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories which constitute reality. But every statement subjects him to them. He is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which has a thou, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and an endless time. He is a being, not being itself. As such he is bound to the subject object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. And this
is decisive for the necessity of transcending theological theism. For God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object.\textsuperscript{30}

God as the all-powerful heavenly king becomes “the invisible tyrant,” the omnipotent, omniscient sovereign who gives rise to the classical problem of evil. It is this model of God that atheism is right to reject—though by doing so atheism rejects only an idol. This God “becomes the model of everything against which Existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control.”\textsuperscript{31}

Rather than this God who is a person, Tillich affirms the God above this God, the absolute unconditional of which this God is a symbol, and a dangerous one at that. The core mistake of classical theism, Tillich therefore maintains, is to make a single symbol—one that has to be recognized as a symbol and situated among a variety of others—into the concrete picture of the ultimate. This, he claims, is idolatry. In contrast, the God above the God of theism points to the panentheistic tendencies entailed in the doctrines of the divine life and dual participation: “If the self participates in the power of being-itself it receives itself back. For the power of being acts through the power of individual selves.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Pantheism}

For Tillich, pantheism means that God is “identified with the unity and totality of finite possibilities, but he has ceased to be the power of the ground in all of them, and therefore he has ceased to transcend them. He has poured all his power into a system of forms, and he is bound to these forms.”\textsuperscript{33} This connects Tillich’s rejection of classical theism with his rejection of pantheism, for both make God finite. Classical theism makes
God a being among beings—in separating God from creation classical theism seeks to affirm God’s ultimate transcendence, but it does so at the cost of God’s ultimacy. “That than which none greater can be conceived” is made a being among beings and is therefore limited by nonbeing, rather than the eternal overcoming of nonbeing. Pantheism seeks to correct for this tendency by affirming God’s radical immanence, but again at the cost of bringing God into subjection to the structure of finitude.

Pantheism, as an alternative to classical theism, involves as perhaps its most characteristic feature the denial of one specific aspect of classical theism. This is one element of pantheism that is shared with panentheism. Classical theism involves the view that “ultimate reality is a being which is distinct from the world and any other reality. This distinction involves a separation between God and the world that makes any interaction between God and the world problematic.” Pantheism denies doctrines of a God that is in some sense separate from the world, that “God is “totally other” than the world or ontologically distinct from it. For his part, as we have seen, Tillich affirms the transcendence of God but denies radical separation … at least from God’s side. The human being is separated from the ground of its being—the characteristic feature of existence is estrangement. Yet for Tillich, God is neither an other being—God is not a being at all—nor is God simply identical to the world. In fact, the terminology is extremely important, since for Tillich, following Heidegger, “world” is not simply the totality of all things but the structural unity of environment made possible by reflexive self-awareness and one element in the self-world polarity. Hence, “world” is one of the structural elements of being, an element of finitude, and therefore can never be equated with God.
That problematic identification is intensified by the pantheistic “belief in one
God, a God identical to the all-inclusive unity.” According to Levine, “however Unity
is interpreted, the world is not simply an all-inclusive Unity in the sense that the world,
understood to be everything, is the ‘unity’ composed of everything. This would be to
interpret it as asserting that everything that exists simply is everything that exists; or to
put it another way, everything is (of course) all-inclusively everything. This is true but
vacuous, and it trivializes pantheism at the outset.” Rather, “Unity is explained in various
ways that are often interrelated. These connections range from mutual entailment, to
different types of causal and contingent relations. Roughly, Unity is interpreted 1)
onologically; 2) naturalistically — in terms of ordering principle(s), force(s) or plans; 3)
substantively . . . and 4) genealogically — in terms of origin.”

Yet Levine does not clarify how any of these other options avoid replacing one
triviality with another. The claim that all that is, is one thing by virtue of being all-
inclusive means that adding the word God to that is superfluous. Yet each of the other
four options could be said of the world without needing to claim divinity for it as well. In
fact, Tillich claims along with Levine that pantheism does not involve the more basic
triviality, but that it contains a more serious error instead:

Pantheism does not mean, never has meant, and never should mean that
everything that is, is God. If God is identified with nature . . . it is not the totality
of natural objects which is called God but rather the creative power and unity of
nature, the absolute substance present in everything. And if God is identified with
the absolute of idealistic monism, it is the essential structure of being, the essence
of all essences, which is called God. . . . If God is understood as universal
essence, as the form of all forms, he is identified with the unity and totality of
finite possibilities, but he has ceased to be the power of the ground in all of them,
and therefore he has ceased to transcend them. He has poured all his power into a
system of forms, and he is bound to these forms. This is what pantheism means.
Here Tillich affirms the transcendence of God against the exclusive immanence of pantheism. But again, why prefer Tillich’s claim for transcendence? It cannot be the case that Tillich simply appeals to orthodoxy, for he departs from orthodoxy on any number of points.

That answer can be found by returning to Levine’s statement that the all-inclusive unity is held by pantheists to be divine, and the charge of redundancy it invites. As Tillich phrases the objection, “it denies the infinite distance between the whole of finite things and their infinite ground, with the consequence that the term ‘God’ becomes interchangeable with the term ‘universe’ and therefore is semantically superfluous.”

Levine answers the question “Why do pantheists ascribe divinity to the Unity?” with an appeal to experience: “The reason is similar to why theists describe God as holy. They experience it as such.” Yet this confuses the experience of the holy, through which divinity is mediated and revealed, with the divine itself, and thus in Tillich’s sense of the term it is idolatry.

Connecting the ontological and existential questions, as we did in the first two chapters, we must ask why the unity of all that is, is experienced as holy? We must look to the condition of the possibility of that experience, and for Tillich that condition is found in the depth of being, the ground that unifies the structural elements of being. In other words, it is because the depth of being is experienced in and through the experience of the unity of being that we can and do experience divinity in existence. We quoted David E. Klemm and William H. Klink on the subject of unity and depth in the end of Chapter I, and the quote bears repeating here:

*The depth of the structure is a presentation of the fundamental principle according to which the basic elements of the structure are seen as both unified...*
and preserved in their difference. In this sense the concept of depth is always implied in the concept of structure: any structure has a depth insofar as the structure is a unified, coherent structure. The depth of a structure is thus immediately present in the structure itself as ground, basis, and principle.\(^{40}\)

Being is a unity, a coherent structural whole, and it is experienced as such in the experience of the sacredness of the creative power and unity of nature. Yet it is the power of being that is divine, and nature is sacred as a self-manifestation of divinity. In the unity of the structure of being is revealed the ground of that structure, the abyss of reason’s limit. This is the transcendence that pantheism denies, according to Tillich. It worships the finite manifestation of being-itself and binds God to the structure of that manifestation.

**Threefold “in-ness”**

Brierley claims that panentheism represents a middle path between the extremes of classical theism and pantheism as one of the three essential types of the doctrine of God.\(^{41}\) Tillich rejects both of the extreme positions for similar reasons, and those reasons bear on his articulation of a panentheistic theology. Classical theism emphasizes God’s transcendence but brings God into finitude by utterly separating God from creation, thus negating God’s ultimacy. Pantheism emphasizes God’s immanence but makes God identical to the totality of finite, structured being, thus negating God’s ultimacy. Tillich must take Anselm’s understanding that God is “that than which none greater can be conceived” as a rule for thinking God and understand God to be both fully immanent and fully transcendent, thereby avoiding the pitfall of negating God’s ultimacy. The motivating force between much of Tillich’s system is therefore deeply panentheistic; it
remains now to show in detail how the content of his system adheres to common panentheistic themes.

Linguistically, panentheism literally simply means all-in-God. This is well known. Yet much hangs on the one-syllable difference between pantheism and panentheism. What does it mean to say both “the world is in God and God is in the world”? Clearly the answer to this question, as Peacocke notes, “depends on prior metaphysical and theological interpretations of the world ‘in’ which God is deemed to be present.” It was the work of Chapter I to analyze the most relevant aspects of Tillich on that prior interpretation, and much of Chapter II developed that analysis, through a consideration of the symbol of the divine life, of the way God can be said to live in and through the world. Yet Tillich also speaks directly to the question of the syllable “-en” with what he terms “threefold ‘in-ness’.” This is found in the only place where he ever considers his own panentheism directly, the last four pages of his entire eight-hundred and ninety-two page Systematic Theology.

The threefold “in-ness” corresponds to the triune moments of the divine life and the analogous three elements of organic life: “The first meaning of ‘in’ in the phrase ‘in God’ is that it is the ‘in’ of creative origin. It points to the presence of everything that has being in the divine ground of being, a presence that is in the form of potentiality (in a classical formulation, this is understood as the presence of the essences or eternal images or ideas of everything created in the divine mind).” This corresponds to the abyss of the Godhead, the divine principle of self-identity, self-integration, and centeredness. “The second meaning of ‘in’ is that it is the ‘in’ of ontological dependence. Here, the ‘in’ points to the inability of anything finite to be without the supporting power of the
permanent divine creativity—even in the state of estrangement and despair.\textsuperscript{45} This corresponds to the \textit{logos}, the divine principle of self-alteration, self-creation, and growth. “The third meaning of ‘in’ is the ‘in’ of ultimate fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{46} This corresponds to the Spirit, the divine principle of return in and through self-transcendence and ecstatic reunion.

“This threefold ‘in-ness’ of the temporal in the eternal indicates the rhythm both of the divine life and of life universal,” writes Tillich in a strikingly panentheistic turn of phrase. In this interpretation of all-in-God and God-in-all, the divine life is a symbol of the self-manifestation of being-itself in “the way from the merely potential through the actual separation and reunion to fulfillment beyond the separation of potentiality and actuality.”\textsuperscript{47} This speaks to a divine creativity according to which “the world means something for God,” and that in turn speaks to deep implications for our own understanding of God: “He is not a self-sufficient entity who, driven by a whim, creates what he wants and saves whom he wants. Rather, the eternal act of creation is driven by a love which finds fulfillment only through the other one who has the freedom to reject and accept love.”\textsuperscript{48}

**Eight Themes Common to Panentheism**

At this point it would be redundant to continue to demonstrate \textit{that} Tillich’s theology is panentheistic. Yet Brierley’s long list of panentheistic thinkers (thirty-some and counting) clearly indicates that there is a wide variety of panenthisms. Hence we turn now to a brief consideration of the specific way Tillich is panentheistic. Brierely has helpfully distinguished “eight facets of panentheist language which are (largely) common
We will thus take each of them turn, showing that Tillich’s distinctive theology can be framed in terms of the whole list: (1) the cosmos as God’s body; (2) the language of “in and through”; (3) the cosmos as sacrament; (4) language of “inextricable intertwining”; (5) the dependence of God on the cosmos; (6) the intrinsic and positive value of the cosmos; (7) divine possibility; and (8) degree Christology.

The first facet of panentheist language is the common metaphor that speaks of the cosmos as “God’s body.” This is a term that is never used by Tillich and perhaps rightly so, as it is the most liable to confusion, especially given the deep influence of substance dualism on the general understanding of the relation of the physical and cognitive aspects of life. In any case, the metaphorical nature of this language must always be taken into account. As a metaphor, however, the idiom of the cosmos as God’s body has its purpose: “the relation of mind and body, and correspondingly of God and cosmos, safeguards the distinction of each yet does not (on a psychosomatic anthropology) allow their separation.”

Yet there are problems with the body metaphor. On the one hand, there is nothing beyond or outside the cosmos, whereas there clearly are things outside of the body. This is telling, and certainly points to a key limitation of the metaphor. On the other hand, Brierely notes, “the parts of human bodies do not have conscious relations with the person who is their whole, unlike parts of the cosmos and God.” This is far less telling, for it could well be argued that parts of the body such as cells may have far more awareness of the conditions of the whole of which they are a part than we currently
imagine. Certainly, a cell can often have a more immediate awareness, if not consciousness, of the chemical composition of its surroundings than the “whole person” has of the chemical balances of its constitutive parts. Moreover, few of us have direct, unmediated consciousness of the effects of God in our lives—this is precisely the need for symbols.

The second facet of panentheist language, according to Brierely, is the language of “in and through.” “The ‘in’ simply repeats the ‘in’ of panentheism . . . but the ‘through’ implies both the immanence of the actor and also the actor’s transcendence, since for something to come, work, or act ‘through’ something else, it needs to come from beyond it.” This language has recurred throughout our analysis, especially in terms of the divine life, and is used by Tillich himself. The third facet of panentheist language is the tendency to view the cosmos as sacrament. This relates directly to the language of “in and through,” since “the whole cosmos, for panentheism, is sacramental, for it is something under, in, and through which God comes; and the specific sacraments of the church are simply particular intensifications of the general ‘sacramental principle,’ signs, symbols, and reminders that any and every thing has the potential to become a vehicle of the divine.” Tillich clearly takes this view, for he writes, “Concrete sacraments develop over long periods of time. No part of encountered reality is excluded beforehand from the possibility that it might become sacramental material.” This is not to say that every encountered thing is God or may be a god—a common (if misleading) caricature of pantheistic and animistic beliefs—but that everything, as an aspect of the self-manifestation of being-itself, has the power to become “a medium of the Spirit.”
The fourth facet of panentheist language is that of inextricable intertwining. Again, this facet can be discussed in terms of self-manifestation. If structured being is the self-manifestation of being-itself, if God’s generating and sustaining creativity is expressed in and through creation, if the Divine Life is “the eternal dimension of what happens in the universe,” then it makes little sense to speak of a ground and power of being fully separate from that of which it is the ground and power. God is transcendent as the ground of being but immanent as the power of being, and that which is cannot be apart from the power of being. Granted, the state of existential estrangement separates one from the ground of one’s being, but not utterly. All instances of life are grounded in and empowered by the power of being moving through the dialectical dynamic of the divine life—whereas each particular existence “stands out” from the whole as the thing it is in the second moment of the divine life, all things are unified in the dialectical movement as a whole.

The fifth facet of panentheist language is related to the fourth, and is among the most controversial elements of panentheism: God’s dependence on the cosmos. According to panentheistic thought, due to the inextricable intertwining (expressed in the language of “in and through”), “God needs the cosmos for the fulfillment of God’s nature of love.” But here again we find affirmation of the panentheistic position in the last four pages of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, where he writes the following: “the eternal act of creation is driven by a love which finds fulfillment only through the other one who has the freedom to accept and to accept love.” As we mentioned above, human existence is marked by separation, estrangement, and that estrangement is precisely the product of the freedom Tillich here cites as a necessary condition for the fulfillment of
the divine love that is the force of creation. A god that did not live in and through the life of creation would be a static god at best and an unconcerned, aloof one at worst. This makes the relation between God and creation two-way: “Although most considerations given within the theological circle deal with man and his world in their relation to God,” Tillich recognizes, “our final consideration points in the opposite direction and speaks of God in his relation to man and his world.”

The sixth facet of panentheist language is that it affirms the intrinsic, positive value of the cosmos. We discussed the intrinsic value of life in detail in Chapter II, and in that discussion we saw that for Tillich life is a universal phenomenon. The connections are not difficult to make. If life has intrinsic positive value, and if everything partakes of the processes characteristic of life, then everything has positive intrinsic value—though as we also saw that value does admit of gradations. Moreover, if the whole of creation partakes of the dialectical process characteristic of life—self-integration (centeredness, self-identity), self-alteration (growth, self-creation), and self-transcendence (return)—then the whole of creation, the cosmos, has intrinsic, positive value.

The seventh facet of panentheist language is the possibility of God. This connects to the fourth facet, God’s dependence on the cosmos, and it too is controversial. For many the idea of a God who suffers makes God less than the all-powerful supreme being—but of course this is a formulation Tillich explicitly rejects. And we have seen that Tillich does affirm this in the already cited idea that “God himself is said to participate in the negativities of creaturely existence.” Of course, as the transcendent ground of being God cannot be said to suffer in the same way that creatures do, for to
suffer as a creature is to experience privation, limitation, or harm. “Suffering, like death, is an element of finitude,” Tillich notes. Further, “Suffering is meaningful to the extent that it calls for protection and healing in the being which is attacked by pain. It can show the limits and the potentialities of a living being. . . . One of the causes of meaningless suffering—indeed, the main cause—is the aloneness of the individual being, his desire to overcome it by union with other beings, and the hostility which results from the rejection of this desire.” Whether meaningful or meaningless, therefore, suffering speaks to limitation. It is ironic, though, that by denying the suffering of God by making God eternally unchanging and impassible, the classical theist separates God from creation, thus limiting that which can admit to no limits. In the intertwining self-manifestation of the divine life, these limits are shattered, and the God that suffers by participation is less limited than the one that cannot suffer.

Moreover, in Tillich’s system this suffering—the limits and aloneness of the creature—is directly the product of the second moment of the divine life, the *logos*, the meaning and structure of being, the principle of self-creation through self-limited. In this moment the abyssal divine ground makes itself definite in its fullness by becoming finite, limited—that is, by expressing itself in and through finite beings… and in this moment both the suffering of the creature and the participatory suffering of God are born. God does not suffer as an individual creature suffers, for God is not a being. God suffers as the living God, as the ground and power of being manifest in and through dual participation. This participation cannot be participation only in joy and love, for then God would again be limited in God’s involvement. Rather, in taking nonbeing into itself, being-itself manifests itself in the divine life, which is the eternal dimension of the life of
the cosmos and of all living things. Thus God becomes the principle of the possibility of suffering: “The element of nonbeing, seen from inside is the suffering God takes upon himself by participating in existential estrangement or the state of unconquered negativity.”

The eighth and final facet of panentheist language, according to Brierley, is degree Christology. Tillich’s Christology is notoriously complex and nuanced, and extremely difficult to fully understand. A full discussion of the subject is beyond the scope and purpose of this dissertation. Yet it is not entirely unrelated, and thus we will briefly discuss some of the more salient points of Tillich’s understanding of the symbol of the Christ here, concluding our discussion of the distinct way in which Tillich can be called a panentheist. Degree Christology sees the Christ as different from other people by degree rather than by kind. Tillich’s doctrine of the Christ as the New Being seems speak to a Christ who is different from other people by fully actualizing universal human potentialities, potentialities that in all other people are never fully actualized but are still human potentialities and are actualized in varying degrees in all human beings. Again, this is a massive subject, one Tillich himself spent an entire volume of his Systematic Theology explicating. Our discussion will be far less than complete. Yet I believe that we can briefly outline the ways in which Tillich’s Christology is degree Christology.

First, we must consider Tillich’s idea of the human being as human being, especially concerning the idea of estrangement and separation. We have briefly touched on them above, but it is here necessary to consider Tillich’s understanding of estrangement in some detail, for Christ as the New Being overcomes the estrangement characteristic of existence while still in existence. “Although man is actually separated
from the infinite," Tillich writes, "he could not be aware of it if he did not participate in it potentially." Hence, humans as humans have the potentiality of participating in infinity; life (here, human life) is the actualization of potentiality; thus, it belongs to human life to be capable of actualizing their connection to the infinite from the human side. This connection is always actual from God’s side, for God is the power of being giving the power to be to all that is. And it is actual from the human side through dual participation, though it is fully actualized only in the conscious return to the unity of the divine life in self-transcendence on the other side of limitation.

In human beings this full actualization is a matter of anticipation. We are aware of our participation in infinity—sometimes only potentially—but where we are aware of it consciously it is as a question, the question expressed in the ontological argument. We are aware of the infinite as through a glass darkly. We are not fully that in actuality which we are potentially. Moreover, in actualizing finite potentialities we cut off our ability to actualize others, thus strengthening our separation from the infinite—thus are freedom and estrangement connected. One is “estranged, but not cut off, from God.” And this estrangement is a necessary condition of existence, for it is only through separation that a thing can be the thing that it is. It makes it possible to be a self in-but-apart-from a world, a subject cognizant of the object from which it is separated but with which it is united in the perception of truth. It is a product of the self-alteration of the second moment of the Divine Life, as we pointed out above. “Through the separation within himself god loves himself,” Tillich writes, “he loves that which is estranged from himself.” Thus, “One belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged.”
This, Tillich says, is the “old reality,” the “state of the estrangement of man and his world from God.”

The Christ, the Messiah, is according to Christianity supposed to bring universal regeneration, a new reality. Here it is tempting to note that we are still estranged—indeed, it is the project of existentialism to analyze the old reality—and thus the Christ must not yet have brought universal regeneration. Yet we must recall what Tillich said about the Fall: it is not an event that happened once, but a universal condition. The New Being, though manifest in a single, historical being, is not an historical, once-for-all regeneration, but a state in which one can partake. This must be understood through a consideration of the meaning of the Christian symbol of the Christ.

The symbol of the Christ—the Messiah—comes from Jewish prophetic writings. “The Messiah, the ‘anointed one,’ is the King. He conquers enemies and establishes peace.” This is a historical role, and in the earliest imagination the Messiah was expected to restore Israel to independence and glory. “In apocalyptic literature the Messiah is elevated to cosmic significance.” In Christian thought it is believed that the Messiah appeared on Earth in the figure of an historical individual: Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the Christian symbol, Jesus the Christ, combines the name of a particular man with a title expressing a special mythological function: “to establish the reign of God in Israel and in the world.”

Tillich’s account of how the expected Messiah with a localized historical function is transformed into Jesus the Christ who redeems all humanity is fascinating and insightful. The development of the symbol occurs in four stages, he writes. (1) The idea of the Messiah arises and grows in its own culture and language. This is, of course, a feature of any symbol at all. In this case, the symbol “points to the historical-
transhistorical figure through whom Jahweh will establish his kingdom in Israel.” Thus the vision is simultaneously global and radically local, anticipating the victory of the God of the Israelites for His chosen people in the Promised Land. (2) The symbol is used as an expression of and an answer to the universal human predicament. The human condition is experienced as steeped in injustice and misery; a new way of things is asked for, and the Messiah is expected to bring it. (3) The symbol is transformed when it is used to interpret the event upon which Christianity is based. This transformation is a product of the reception of the symbol as an answer to a perplexing event, the death of the Messiah: “the messiah who is supposed to bring the new eon is defeated by the powers of the old eon. The defeat of the Messiah on the Cross is the most radical transformation of the symbol of the messiah.” This is the key moment in the transformation from the expected Messiah to the risen Christ. (4) That interpretation suffers distortion. Literalistic, supranaturalist thinking makes the symbol of the Christ into a quasi-magical figure: “‘Christ’ became an individual with supranatural powers who, through a voluntary sacrifice, made it possible for God to save those who believed in him.” This, of course, is the picture of the Messiah that has dominated Christianity throughout its history.71

The literalistic distortion, however, is based on two very meaningful concepts brought together in the symbol of the Christ: mediator and incarnation. As mediator, the Christ bridges the gap between the infinite and the finite: “Mediation is reunion.”72 Here, the reunion is between essential (potential) and existential (actual) humanity: “The paradox of the Christian message is that in one personal life essential manhood has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them.”73
Incarnation here does not mean “God has become man” in any sense other than that being-itself manifests in and through finite being without ceasing to be the infinite, eternal, ontologically ultimate ground and power of being overcoming nonbeing. And this is precisely what Tillich means by incarnation, for we have already seen that the second moment of the divine life—the *logos*—is self-creation through self-alteration, or self-separation. Hence Tillich interprets the famous Johannine idea that the *logos* became flesh according to this understanding.\(^7^4\)

Tillich rejects the literalistic distortion of the symbol of the Christ insofar as it claims that the God of classical theism became a human being and died as a redemptive sacrifice to wash away original sin through faith in the shed blood of the man-god. Still, though, he does insist that Christianity must hold that the conditions of existence were defeated in the life of one individual named Jesus of Nazareth:

Christianity is what it is through the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth, who has been called “the Christ,” is actually the Christ, namely, he who brings the new state of things, the New Being. Wherever the assertion that Jesus is the Christ is maintained, there is the Christian message; wherever this assertion is denied, the Christian message is not affirmed. Christianity was born, not with the birth of the man who is called “Jesus,” but in the moment that one of his followers was driven to say to him, “Thou art the Christ.” . . . For the event on which Christianity is based has two sides: the fact which is called “Jesus of Nazareth” and the reception of this fact by those who received him as the Christ. . . . This gives the story its tremendous symbolic power. He who is the Christ has to die for his acceptance of the title “Christ.” And those who continue to call him the Christ must assert the paradox that he who is supposed to overcome existential estrangement must participate in it and its self-destructive consequences.\(^7^5\)

The two-sided nature of the symbol is of central importance for Tillich. The Christ cannot be the Christ apart from the reception of him as the Christ: “Without this reception the Christ would not have been the Christ, namely, the manifestation of the New Being in time and space,” Tillich writes. “The receptive side of the Christian event
is as important as the factual side. And only their unity creates the event upon which Christianity is based.\textsuperscript{76} This one sentence is extremely important, for it effectively maintains that only in the reception of Jesus as the Christ is the manifestation of the New Being—the overcoming of the conditions of existence through their acceptance—manifest.

It is for just this reason that, for Tillich, the fact that the search for the historical Jesus is doomed to failure is largely irrelevant. In the end, the concrete identity of the man called Jesus cannot be established—and that is unimportant. What is important is that reality has been transformed by the reception of Jesus who is called the Christ as the man in whom the separation from the divine ground of being was overcome even in the conditions of existence. For the same reason the literalistic distortion of the symbol is rejected: it is the historical reception and transformation of the symbol that manifests the reality of the New Being, the victory over the conditions of existence in and through their acceptance in the courage to be. The New Being has to be pictured as actual in one man, for to be conquered concretely existence must be conquered in actuality.\textsuperscript{77} But it is the reception of the symbol that has the transformative power, not the literal death of the only-begotten Son of the God of classical theism in a barbaric blood sacrifice to an angry, vengeful, tribal deity.

Thus the reception and transformation of the symbol of Jesus who is the Christ is the manifestation of the New Being, and the New Being conquers existence within the conditions of existence through the power to accept acceptance despite separation. In the acceptance of the conditions of existence one accepts that one is accepted despite one’s estrangement. And it is God manifest in concrete life that makes this possible: \textquotedblrightThe
divine self-affirmation is the power that makes the self-affirmation of the finite being, the courage to be, possible. . . . Courage participates in the self-affirmation of being-itself.”

Here we find Tillich’s characteristic language coming out in the explication of the New Being: participation drives acceptance, the courage to overcome the manifestations of nonbeing—death, meaninglessness, anxiety—even while subject to them.

The New Being conquers estrangement through the positive acceptance of the conditions of existence in the courage to be, the affirmation of one’s own being in its participation in the self-manifestation of being-itself. This is the third moment of the divine life, the return of God to God’s self through the separation within God’s self that is the creative act. “It is the accepting of the acceptance without somebody or something that accepts. It is the power of being-itself that accepts and gives the courage to be. . . . The acceptance of the God above the God of theism makes us a part of that which is not also a part but is the ground of the whole.” It is nonbeing as an active ontological principle that makes God a living God—it is the separation within God that allows for the divine life, but which also creates the existential condition of estrangement. In this way being-itself takes nonbeing into itself in a creative act of self-manifestation. To take the markers of the nonbeing that allows us to be what and who we are into our self-affirmation in full acceptance—to affirm guilt, despair, emptiness, anxiety, and doubt as productive and creative elements of our own being, rooted in an awareness of ourselves as particular manifestations of the power of being . . . this is the self-transcendence that is the third moment of the divine life just as it is the fuel for our own self-transcendence. The two cannot be separated.
The picture of the full actualization of this human potential in a single, concrete life is Jesus who is the Christ. In our reception of that possibility, Tillich holds, we are encouraged to actualize the same potentiality in ourselves. That we do so in an imperfect degree is in fact an integral element to the courage to accept the conditions of existence. Still, the picture of Jesus the Christ is the picture of the full and perfect actualization of a universally human potentiality. Tillich’s Christology is powerful, transformative, controversial, and complex … and it is degree Christology. Moreover, Tillich’s doctrine of the courage to be and the New Being are inseparable from the elements of his theology that are clearly panentheistic: self-manifestation, the Divine Life, dual participation—all of this is ingredient in Tillich’s doctrine of the Christ. Thus, in his Christology as well as in his ontology, Tillich is a panentheist.

The Problem of Freedom and Divine Possibility

in Tillich’s Panentheism

A serious challenge to Tillich’s panentheism is raised by David H. Nikkel. Nikkel does not believe that Tillich is not a panentheist, but that Tillich’s panentheism is compromised by his contradictory statements regarding God’s impassibility. I do not believe that Nikkel’s critique is ultimately telling due to his neglect of the import of self-separation for the divine life, but it does raise important issues that should be addressed.

Nikkel begins with a crucial distinction that any successful panentheism must address: the distinction between the active and passive aspects of God. The passive aspect involves divine knowledge and for panentheism, which denies God’s separation from creation, entails divine possibility, or capability to feel suffering: “by knowing what
occurs, God is in some sense qualified or affected by it,” Nikkel notes. Moreover, Tillich does not simply affirm that God knows creaturely suffering but that God participates in the negativities of creaturely existence, a necessary feature of any panentheism that would not deny the reality of the negativities of creaturely existence. The active aspect involves divine power and the extent to which God controls events. “As panentheistically active, God empowers all that exists—without externality or mediation. The active aspect then refers to God’s being the very power of being in all that is, the very power of acting in every action—but in the radical sense that whatever power we have is God’s power and whatever action we take is in a (qualified) sense God’s act.”

This is, of course, Tillich’s position, but it makes the issue of freedom problematic. Tillich answers the problem by pointing to existential separation—which we treated above—as the condition of the possibility of finite freedom. The individual is both a manifestation of the power of being according to the principle of dual participation but is also an individual:

Man does exist, and his existence [actualization in which the elemental polarities are unbalanced in creative conflict] is different from his essence [potentiality in which the elemental polarities are balanced in creative tension]. Man and the rest of reality are not only “inside” the process of the divine life but also “outside” it. Man is grounded in it, but he is not kept within the ground. Man has left the ground in order to “stand upon” himself, to actualize what he essentially is, in order to be finite freedom. This is the point at which the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the fall join. It is the most difficult and the most dialectical point in the doctrine of creation. And, as every existential analysis of the human situation shows, it is the most mysterious point in human experience. Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness. The creature has actualized its freedom in so far as it is outside the creative ground of the divine life. . . . To sum up the discussion: being a creature means to be rooted in the creative ground of the divine life and to actualize one’s self through freedom. Creation is fulfilled in the creaturely self-realization which simultaneously is freedom and destiny. But it is fulfilled through separation from the creative ground through a break between
essence and existence. Creaturely freedom is the point at which creation and the fall coincide.\textsuperscript{82}

As we continue with Nikkel’s critique of Tillich’s panentheism we must keep in mind the dialectical nature of the joined doctrines of creation and fall. This is to say that we must keep in mind that the separation that puts the creature “outside the creative ground of the divine life” is the self-separation of the second moment in the dialectical dynamic of the process of the divine life, in which the infinite ground of being manifests itself in and through becoming what it is not by taking nonbeing into itself.

Nikkel’s challenge does not specifically have to do with creaturely freedom—he grants that Tillich affirms it—but with God’s temporality and passibility. That is, according to Nikkel Tillich undermines his panentheism with respect to the passive aspect of God: “despite his desire to affirm the full inclusion of temporality, of ‘nonbeing,’ and of creaturely spontaneity in the divine life,” Nikkel pens, “the pull of the theological traditions is evidenced in statements not wholly consistent with such intentions.”\textsuperscript{83} As we have noted, divine temporality and divine passibility are inherently connected—and divine temporality, Nikkel asserts, is “crucial for a coherent panentheism: for if God is related to the universe, which is temporal, with utter immediacy . . . God must be correspondingly temporal, at least in part.” Moreover, this temporality must be open to the future if creaturely spontaneity is real.\textsuperscript{84} The issue of temporality and freedom, then, is an issue of whether the actualization and self-transcendence inherent in the divine life “involve various real possibilities, only some of which will be actualized,” or whether “the divine life, including all that happens in the universe which is embraced by that life” consists in “the\textit{ temporal or processive} execution of an eternally totally predetermined—or at least foreseen—plan.”\textsuperscript{85} This
question involves negotiating between three possible understandings of the relation between God and temporal creation: classical eternity, closed divine temporality, and open divine temporality.

According to the idea of classical eternity—generally held in the classical theism Tillich rejects—“God’s eternally actualized and unchanging experience consists of knowing the world” from without. In this view, “the whole of creation through all time is already and always actual from the divine perspective, but from our (deficient or illusory?) perspective, to be acted out in time. The actual relation of God to the world for God would not be at all temporal or processive.”86 Tillich, as a panentheist, must reject this on principle. For Tillich, all relations between God and creation are internal, “the inner relations of the divine life,” for there can be no externality to God:

If God is said to be in relation, this statement is as symbolic as the statement that God is a living God. . . . Every relation in which God becomes an object to a subject, in knowledge and action, must be affirmed and denied at the same time. It must be affirmed because man is a centered self to whom every relation involves an object. It must be denied because God can never become an object for man’s knowledge or action. Therefore, mystical theology, inside and outside Christian theology, speaks of God’s loving and recognizing himself through man. This means that if God becomes an object, nevertheless he remains a subject.87

God’s self recognition through human experience of the holy would seem necessarily to occur in and through time, therefore, for any human experience is necessarily temporal. Even “timeless” mystical experiences receive their religious meaning by being incorporated into and interpreted through an individual’s religious life.

Closed divine temporality involves the idea that God does experience the processive unfolding of creation, but that that unfolding is fully predetermined. This view is closest to many pantheistic views, according to which a finite set of potentialities is actualized; all possibilities are actualized through time. Whatever does not become
actual at some point in time was not possible. This cannot be Tillich’s view, for he affirms creaturely freedom, according to which fallen existence inherently involves closing off certain real potentialities in the actualization of others. Hence Tillich must affirm open divine temporality.

Open divine temporality involves the idea that certain real potentialities will not be actualized in the exercise of creaturely freedom, with which God is immediately involved. Thus, in a very real sense, God grows in the exercise of creaturely freedom, in the sense that certain potentialities become actualized in the unfolding of the divine life and others do not, and this occurs processively. This view seems to be entailed in Tillich’s rejection of classical theism and classical eternity, expressed in his rejection of the idea that God is *actus purus*, or pure actuality, being without becoming, and hence static:

Potentiality and actuality appear in classical theology in the famous formula that God is *actus purus*, the pure form in which everything potential is actual, and which is the eternal self-intuition of the divine fullness (*pleroma*). . . . Pure actuality, that is, actuality free from any element of potentiality, is a fixed result; it is not alive. Life includes the separation of potentiality and actuality. The nature of life is actualization, not actuality. The God who is *actus purus* is not the living God.88

We know that Tillich’s God is a living God, and that in the second moment of the divine life self-separation drives the process which includes the separation of potentiality and actuality, such that creatures can actualize some potentialities and not actualize others. Thus in the unfolding process of the divine life God’s passive aspect is realized. As Nikkel puts the point, “there are real potentialities that the creatures may not actualize and thus real potentialities for the divine knowledge of the creatures that may not be actualized.”89
This is, of course the panentheist position. God is temporal in God’s immediate participation in finite life as the power of being it actualizes. This must entail that God is capable of being affected by God’s creation in at least that aspect of the divine life—because creaturely freedom determines the unfolding of God’s self-love and self-recognition. And Tillich seems to explicitly affirm this view in his claim that creaturely self-transcendence (growth) involves risk for God as well as for the creature:

Everything wants to grow. It wants to increase its power of being in forms which include and conquer more non-being. . . . In this drive it can happen that a being, when transcending itself loses itself. Life meets this threat by creating forms of growth. The self-transcendence of a being occurs in forms which determine the process of self-transcendence. But this determination is never complete. If it were, one could not speak of self-transcendence. . . . The incompleteness of the laws of growth produces a risk in everything living. In transcending itself a being may fulfill and it may destroy itself. One could call this the risk of creativity. Symbolically, one could say that even God, in creating, took the risk upon Himself that creation would turn into destruction.90

Yet, as Nikkel notes, this risk does not endanger the “eternal fulfillment” of the divine life.91 Thus he concludes that in Tillich’s theology “there is some openness of the future, some novelty, for God at least in respect to creaturely decisions . . . but that divine fulfillment or happiness is not open to the future.”92 Here, then, we come to Nikkel’s critique. On the one hand, he argues, Tillich is ambiguous regarding the possibility of true creaturely freedom, taking with his left hand what he gave with his right. On the other hand, he argues, Tillich’s claim that God’s eternal fulfillment is not at risk in creaturely freedom undermines the commitment to divine passibility his panentheism requires. We will take these criticisms in order.

Clearly Tillich wants to affirm true creaturely freedom. “Life is the dynamic actualization of being,” he writes, and “the power of being becomes manifest only in the process in which it actualizes its power.” In this process “nothing is determined a priori,
nothing is final except those structures which make the dynamics of life possible. Life includes continuous decisions.”\textsuperscript{93} The problem, as Nikkel sees it, is that the actualization of the power of being through creaturely decisions entails that it is the divine power of being that decides \textit{through} us.\textsuperscript{94} This is an implication, too, of all of Tillich’s affirmations that God loves and recognizes himself through us. Does this undermine the idea of creaturely freedom? What can freedom mean when in every act the power of being is the power of that action? Is creaturely freedom entirely swallowed up by divine power? At the very least, Nikkel maintains, Tillich is ambiguous on these questions.

The denial of creaturely freedom, to whatever extent it is present in Tillich, connects to a denial of God’s passibility. Tillich affirms in more than one passage that God “is in no way dependant on man or on any finite being or on any finite concern,”\textsuperscript{95} and that “there is no creaturely independence from which an external relation between God and the creature could be derived.”\textsuperscript{96} Similar is the assertion that “in the divine life the element of chaos,” which is the element of risk in all growth, “does not endanger its eternal fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{97} Does this contradict the statement we have already considered, that “the eternal act of creation is driven by a love which finds fulfillment only through the other one who has the freedom to reject and to accept love”?\textsuperscript{98} How can it be that freedom is real, growth involves risk, God participates immediately in the freedom and growth of the creature, but the fulfillment dependant on that creature is not at risk in the risk creaturely growth entails?

In meeting both of these related criticisms we turn to the dialectical dynamic of the divine life. God becomes temporal in the separation within God’s self that is the second moment of the divine life. That is, in self-actualization God becomes that which
God is not: temporal, finite, limited. Yet this process is itself not a temporal process, it is an eternal one. It is not the case that first, at one moment in time, God is the Godhead, then God is the Logos, and then God is the Spirit (regardless of Tillich’s use of “moments” to name these), any more than it is the case that at one point in time a man named Adam was innocent and then at another he fell. In freedom creation and fall coincide, and do so eternally. Thus God does not lose God’s “eternal blessedness” in going out into the negativities of creaturely existence—God is eternally fulfilled in taking nonbeing into being-itself in the very process of self-manifestation, the very process of the divine life, which is the unfolding process of the actualization of potentiality. As the Godhead, the ground and abyss of being, God is eternal; as the logos, the self-separation within God’s self that makes actuality possible, God becomes what God is not, God suffers in and through creaturely suffering; in the Spirit, the return in which God is fulfilled in the love of the free other, God is eternally fulfilled. Hence Tillich’s treatment of divine passibility, divine temporality, and creaturely freedom can be interpreted as dialectical rather than ambiguous.

Indeed, Tillich’s panentheism demands this productive dialectic. This is the meaning of Tillich’s existential call to courageously take the mark of nonbeing—anxiety—into our own lives in a creative and productive self-affirmation: “If the self participates in the power of being-itself it receives itself back. For the power of being acts through the power of the individual selves.”99 This is expressed in his treatment of time and eternity, which follows his doctrine concerning the dual participation of the finite and the infinite:

If the finite is present within the process of the divine life, the forms of finitude (the categories) also are present in it. The divine life includes temporality, but it
is not subject to it. The divine eternity includes time and transcends it. The time of the divine life is determined not by the negative element of creaturely time but by the present, not by the “no longer” and the “not yet” of our time. Our time, the time which is determined by nonbeing, is the time of existence. It presupposes the separation of existence from essence and the existential disruption of the moments of time which are essentially united within the divine life.\textsuperscript{100}

This same point is expressed later in this way: “Eternity is the transcendent unity of the dissected moments of time.”\textsuperscript{101} Just as the infinite, unconditional ground of being is the primordial unity of all that is separated in existence, just as the Spirit is the synthesized unity of all that was separated—even in the second moment of the divine life time is included as that which is simultaneously transcended in the eternal process of out-going and return. That this is an eternal process means specifically that is not a temporal process, but is the condition for the possibility of all temporality. Thus the doctrine of dual participation runs throughout the discussions of freedom and temporality; properly understood, the doctrine of the dual participation of the divine life in temporality and freedom are expressions of Tillich’s panentheism.
Notes


6. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.


20. Ibid., 1:237.

21. Ibid., 1:206


26. Ibid., 1:209.


29. Ibid., 1:245.


31. Ibid., 185.

32. Ibid., 188.


34. John Culp, "Panentheism."

35. Michael Levine, "Pantheism."

36. Ibid.


38. Ibid., 2:7.


43. Ibid., xxii.


45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 3:422.


50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 6-7.

52. Ibid., 7.

53. Ibid., 8.

54. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3:123.

55. Ibid., 422.


57. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3:422.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 1:270.

60. Ibid., 2:70-71.

61. Ibid., 2:175.

62. Ibid., 2:9.

63. Ibid., 2:14.

64. Ibid., 1:94-95.

65. Ibid., 1:282.

66. Ibid., 2:45.

67. Ibid., 2:27.

68. Ibid., 2:88.

69. Ibid., 2:89.

70. Ibid., 2:98.

71. Ibid., 2:109-11.

72. Ibid., 2:93.
73. Ibid., 2:94.
74. Ibid., 2:95.
75. Ibid., 2:97.
76. Ibid., 2:99.
77. Ibid., 2:114.
79. Ibid., 185, 187.
81. Ibid., 3.
84. Ibid., 146.
85. Ibid., 151.
86. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 1:246.
91. See Nikkel, 156, and *Systematic Theology* 3:51.
96. Ibid., 1:271.
97. Ibid., 3:51.
98. Ibid., 3:422.


101. Ibid., 1:274.
PART TWO

THE CONCEPT OF NATURE
CHAPTER IV:
NATURE IN TILLICH’S WORK

The Bible has always told us of the beginning and the end of the world. It speaks of eternity before the world was founded; it speaks of the time when God laid the foundations of the earth; it speaks of the shaking of these foundations and of the crumbling of the world. In one of the later books, Second Peter, it says that "the heavens will vanish with a crackling roar, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burnt up." This is no longer vision; it has become physics. We know that in the ground of our earth, and in the ground of everything in our world that has form and structure, destructive forces are bound. Laying the foundations of the earth means binding these forces. When the unruly power of the smallest parts of our material world was restrained by cohesive structures, a place was provided in which life could grow and history develop, in which words could be heard and love be felt, and in which truth could be discovered and the Eternal adored. All this was possible because the fiery chaos of the beginning was transformed into the fertile soil of the earth.

Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*

**Gestalten, Centeredness, and Deep Ecology**

Paul Tillich’s theology of nature is never fully systematized. It is not difficult, however, to piece together what he thought about nature from the scattered paragraphs and sermons in which he discusses the earth and nature. One can readily affirm that Tillich saw nature as well as the human as the self-expression of the ground of being—or, in the language we have been using, the self-manifestation of being-itself or the self-actualization of the divine life. Nature as such, however, is an ambiguous and difficult concept, and Tillich uses it in its ambiguity without ever precisely defining what he means by the term. It will be the project of the next chapter to develop an ontological concept of Nature grounded in Tillich’s philosophical theology. In this chapter we will develop an analysis of Tillich’s views on nature, guided by the analysis of Part One.

Tillich’s views on nature—appropriately enough—lie in the boundary area between two insights. The first is the one articulated in the opening quotation of this
chapter, from *The Shaking of the Foundations*. Here, Tillich notes in no uncertain terms that the destruction of life on earth is possible in our time due to the behavior of the human being, a situation unique in human history but grounded in both the fertility of nature and the human condition. Tillich proclaims:

> But out of the fertile soil of the earth a being was generated and nourished, who was able to find the key to the foundation of all beings. That being was man. He has discovered the key which can unlock the forces of the ground, those forces which were bound when the foundations of the earth were laid. He has begun to use this key. He has subjected the basis of life and thought and will to his will. And he willed destruction. For the sake of destruction he used the forces of the ground; by his thought and his work he unlocked and untied them. That is why the foundations of the earth rock and shake in our time.¹

Scientists have brought this power into our hands, Tillich says, and now like the prophets of old announce the destruction we have wrought with that power. “In this way,” he says, “science is atoning for the idolatrous abuse to which it has lent itself for centuries.”²

The second insight is the mystical, romantic insight that nature is a living expression of the ground of being that Tillich briefly mentions in his “Autobiographical Reflections,” from Kegley and Bretall’s *Theology of Paul Tillich*. The romantic trend in his feeling and thinking, one side of which is his relationship with nature, is, he maintains, “expressed in a predominantly aesthetic-meditative attitude toward nature.” And this attitude is “theologically formulated” as “doctrine of the participation of nature in the process of fall and salvation.” This attitude involves an awareness of a “mystical participation in nature” and an “understanding that nature is the expression of the infinite ground of all things.”³

In the reminder of this chapter we will explore Tillich’s theology of nature in its deeply ecological character, as shown through his discussions of life, *Gestalten*, and centeredness. These ideas come together to show that Tillich saw nature as a life process
and its instances as possessing intrinsic value, which we discussed at length above, rather than as mechanistic. In important ways, this insight makes Tillich’s theology of nature deeply rather than shallowly ecological. We will explore how Tillich’s panentheism leads him to view nature as an expression of the ground of being, and thus potentially revelatory and sacramental. And, finally, we will discuss the important concept of participation in terms of a complexification of the idea of dual participation, introduced in Part One. In the end we will introduce the argument that nature—symbolized as Gaia—is the union of the ontological elements and is centered in the human being, setting up the ability to see nature, as well as the human, as “created in the image of God.”

Considerations of Nature as an ontological concept and as a religious idea will be developed through the next two chapters, preparing us to fully explore the argument that Gaia can be theologically affirmed to be “created in the image” in Part Three.

**Gestalten, and Nature as a Life Process**

We looked at the idea of *Gestalten* in Chapter III under the heading of “The Dimensions and their Relation,” where we considered the organic as characterized by “self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-containing” “living wholes.” In the same chapter we saw that centeredness is constitutive of one of the ontological elements, individuality, which is paired with participation. That is, to be is to be an *individual entity*, which is to be centered—and an individual thing is always a collection of processes which are centered, such that the processes taken together, as a whole, constitute an individual. We also saw that all entities behave spontaneously—this is the condition for the possibility of fully human freedom—and thus that Tillich’s philosophy
(or theology) of nature is not mechanistic. Instead, Tillich’s philosophy of nature is a philosophy of life in the romantic sense. For Tillich, life is a universal attribute—everything that is, and the whole of everything that is, partakes of the process of centering and change characteristic of life as organic. We further saw that the process of life is a process of “going out beyond itself” in a dialectic of centering, growth, and return. The coming-to-be, existence, and passing-away of every entity, even inorganic natural entities, reveals this process—“the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process”\textsuperscript{5}—as does the divine life and the universe as a whole.

Just as the organic “is characterized by self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-continuing Gestalten,”\textsuperscript{6} it would seem that, for Tillich, the global ecosystem must share in that characterization. In Part Three especially we will argue that through evolution (which Tillich accepts) the development from the inorganic to the organic realms of life is a life process—that is, a process of centered growth and return whereby the actualization of potentiality is realized. In fact Tillich implies as much when he writes the following:

If the actualization of potential is a structural condition of all beings, and if this actualization is called ‘life,’ then the universal concept of life is unavoidable. Consequently, the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process. . . . Only the inorganic dimension is actualized in the atom, but all the other dimensions are potentially present. . . . the inorganic has a preferred position among the dimensions in so far as it is the first condition for the actualization of every dimension . . . the dimension of the organic is essentially present in the inorganic; its actual appearance is dependent on conditions the description of which is the task of biology and biochemistry.\textsuperscript{7}

These statements are spread across eight pages of the Third Volume of the \textit{Systematic Theology}. Still, the implication is there: if life is a universal concept and if the
development from the inorganic to the organic is a process by which potentialities present but un-actualized in the inorganic become actualized through evolution … and if that evolutionary process can be called the growth-process of the earth, then the earth is alive—the earth is characterized as a self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-continuing Gestalt. The points after the ellipsis in that argument will be the subject of Chapter VII, but Tillich certainly affirms the first two premises, and it is entirely in keeping with his attitude toward nature that he would accept the third as compatible with his theology, according to which nature is the expression of the ground of being.

So Tillich clearly can and does speak of nature as a living process giving rise to particular sorts of Gestalten. This, of course, is how Gestalten work: they are collections of processes, the components of which are characterized by their participation in a larger whole just as their interactions give rise to that whole. Interestingly, a central element of the deep ecological thinking pioneered by Arne Næss is what he calls “gestalt thinking.”

We turn now to a consideration of what Næss means by gestalt in connection with what has just been said concerning Tillich’s idea of nature as a life process to show that in important ways Tillich’s thoughts on nature can be characterized as deeply ecological.

**Tillich as Deeply Ecological**

The term “deep ecology” was famously coined by Arne Næss in his 1973 article, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary.” In the oft-quoted opening paragraphs of this essay Næss delineates shallow ecological concern from deep. The shallow form stops with the fight against “pollution and resource depletion.” Its central objective is “the health and affluence of people in the developed
countries.” The deep ecology movement rejects the separation of the human being from his or her environment “in favour of the relational, total-field image.” It sees organisms “as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations . . . such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things.”

These things that are constituted by their relations to other things, Næss says, are gestalts. Not only are all individual gestalts interdependent, but individual gestalts in and through that relation function to constitute more encompassing gestalts: “Whole and part are internally related” in this way. For example, Næss writes, consider a piece of music: “The basic character of the whole influences decisively our experience of each of the tones.” Further, each movement of the whole sonata, for instance, is a gestalt of its own—such “subordinate gestalts” are determined by our experience of the individual notes and our knowledge of the sonata as a whole. This dynamic gives rise to a “complex realm of gestalts” in which higher and lower orders (or, in Tillich’s terms, more and less encompassing realms) are constitutively related. Gestalt thinking, in Næss as well as in Tillich, serves to facilitate “the emancipation from strong atomistic or mechanistic trends in analytical thought.”

Moreover, for Næss as for Tillich, everything has a gestalt character. Tillich writes that centeredness “appears in atom and star, in molecule and crystal. It produces structures which inspire the enthusiasm of the artist and which confirm, poetically speaking, the Pythagorean symbol of the musical harmony of the astronomical spheres. This gives to every star as well as to every atom and crystal a kind of individuality. They cannot be divided; they can only be crushed.” Of course the star is a gestalt in the
relevant sense, constituted of billions upon billions of interrelated and interacting atoms, each of which is a gestalt in its own right. Echoing Tillich’s sentiment, Næss writes of individual atoms, stars, crystals and grains of sand as “fragments” that are parts of larger gestalts, larger life processes. “A grain of sand might most spontaneously signify a beach. But of course such an ‘atom’ may be inspected and it will be experienced as of a definite shape and with definite patterns of colours and light—a microcosm which supplies us with endless opportunities for discovery. Then even something so tiny can have a gestalt character. Everything in nature, as nature, has this ability or potency.”

Clearly Tillich and Næss share a similar sentiment in terms of their gestalt thinking and in terms of the contention that life is a universal phenomenon.* This by itself is nearly enough to label Tillich deeply ecologist. Yet Næss lists seven characteristic of deep ecology—to consider Tillich’s thought in reference to each of them would take us into the realms of such things as politics and force us to conjecture as to what Tillich’s stance on pollution might be. Still, two in particular are especially relevant.

First, as we saw above, Næss contends that deep ecology demands the rejection of the “man-in-environment image” in favor of the “relational, total-field image.” Tillich’s rejection of the hierarchical metaphor for the relational model of dimensions and realms seems to be designed with the same idea in mind: the metaphor of hierarchical levels demands that “there is no organic movement from one to the other; the higher is not implicit in the lower, and the lower is not implicit in the higher.” On the other

* Interestingly, the ground of both Tillich and Næss are in Schelling’s philosophy of nature, as Frederick Beiser informs us in The Romantic Imperative. The romantics overcame mechanistic thinking about nature by taking up an organic concept characteristic of gestalt-thinking.
hand, the metaphor of dimensions intends that “the unity of life is seen above its conflicts.”  

Second, deep ecology affirms “Biospherical egalitarianism,” or the idea that “the equal right to live and blossom” among all organisms “is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom.”  

We dealt with this idea as some length in Chapter II under the heading of “Grades of Being and Value.” There it was shown that Tillich should be read as supporting qualified biospherical egalitarianism. That is, each organism, as an organism with its own good, has the right to live and blossom, to actualize its particular potentialities. Insofar as this is a yes-or-no matter—that is, insofar as intrinsic value is either something an organism possesses or does not possess—all organisms have intrinsic value equally simply by virtue of the fact of being living organisms. Yet not every organism shares the same degree of value—it would morally cripple us to affirm that every individual bacterium has the same moral standing as every individual human being. Hence Tillich speaks of grades of value. Still, Tillich does not adhere to the opposite extreme, which is to assign moral standing only to human beings, or to claim that things only have value relative to human interests. In this way, as in his gestalt and relational thinking, Tillich’s views on nature can rightly be characterized as deeply ecological.

**The Panentheistic Character of Tillich’s Theology of Nature**

Though Tillich’s view of nature is in important ways deeply ecological, Tillich rejects a closely related religious position: religious naturalism à la pantheism. As Jerome A. Stone points out, pantheism and religious naturalism are “intersecting concepts.” In Chapter III we saw that for Tillich, pantheism in its form as religious
naturalism means that God is “identified with the unity and totality of finite possibilities, but he has ceased to be the power of the ground in all of them, and therefore he has ceased to transcend them. He has poured all his power into a system of forms, and he is bound to these forms.”

We have further established that Tillich’s panentheistic theology of nature affirms nature as a life process, a process of ongoing development of ever-increasing potentialities, and that dialectical dynamic of the life of nature is an instantiation of the dialectical dynamic of the divine life.

In the beginning of this chapter, too, we saw that for Tillich the life of nature is the creative expression of the divine—or, “nature is the expression of the infinite ground of all things.” And in Chapter II we discussed the concept of dual participation, whereby the divine life participates in finite life as the creative power of being of finite life, and finite life participates in the divine life as a particular instance of its self-manifestation, self-creation, and self-transcendence. In the remainder of this chapter the idea of dual participation will be extended. First, we will discuss Tillich’s doctrine of the participation of nature in the Fall and in salvation, which is the theological formulation of Tillich’s “aesthetic-meditative attitude toward nature.” Second, on that ground, we will discuss the complexification of the idea of dual participation this represents, for now we have a third term: God, humanity, and nature are all somehow participating in each other.

The Participation of Nature in the Fall and in Salvation

With the reciprocal participations of God, nature, and the human, the panentheistic doctrine of divine creative out-pouring in separation and return in spiritual union finds its fullest expression—God, nature, and the human all interpenetrate and
cannot be separated, though existentially the human is separated from that in which it is grounded. These two together, essential unity and existential separation, are theologically formulated in Tillich’s doctrine of the participation of nature in the Fall. Thus, Tillich writes, Christian theology must ask the question, “In respect to the Fall, how is man related to nature? . . . Biblical literalism would answer that the Fall of man changed the structures of nature.” Of course Tillich rejects this answer. On the one hand, biblical literalism mistakes mythology for history. On the other hand, the transition from the inorganic to the organic is gradual, a matter of degrees: “the structures of nature were always as they are now.”

Yet this seems to suggest that creation is not unambiguously good: “From the atomic structures to the most highly developed animals, there are total and centered reactions which can be called ‘spontaneous’ in the dimension of organic life,” Tillich writes, and this centered spontaneity provides analogies to human freedom in nature, “to human good and evil in all parts of the universe.” Tillich continues:

Just as, within man, nature participates in the good and evil he does, so nature, outside man, shows analogies to man’s good and evil doings. Man reaches into nature as nature reaches into man. They participate in each other and cannot be separated from each other. This makes it possible and necessary to use the term “fallen world” and to apply the concept of existence (in contrast to essence) to the universe as well as to man.

So, nature is the finite expression of the infinite ground of being, and as human freedom expresses the creativity of the divine life in the concrete actualization of potentiality, so does nature.

Here it is worthwhile to rehearse a few points concerning Tillich’s doctrine of the Fall—for him it is the transition from essence to existence, where essence is a state of pure potentiality and existence is the actualization of that potentiality. This transition is
always imperfect and always entails the exercise of freedom in the human realm (or spontaneity in the non-human realms). The actualization of potentiality, for the human at least, involves freely cutting off some potentialities to actualize others. Thus is the human being simultaneously incapable of fully and perfectly actualizing his or her potentialities while remaining responsible for his or her fallen state. And thus the Fall is not an event that happened “once upon a time.” The state of essential being prior to the Fall can on principle never have been actual, for as soon as potentiality is actualized it is existence. Or, as Tillich puts it, “the essential nature of man is present in all stages of his development, although in existential distortion.”

This, too, informs Tillich’s interpretation of the idea of original sin. Again, this is not a matter of one man and one woman in a particular time and place choosing a fallen state for all of their descendants for all time. Rather, the actualization of potential is always a matter of the creative exercise of freedom, guided by and creative of destiny. The human being is free and is the actualization of potentiality—and is, as free, always already responsible for that actualization. What has this to do with nature? In the human being, potentialities are actualized, which are always already present in nature, from the inorganic on up: “Man reaches into nature as nature reaches into man. They participate in each other and cannot be separated from each other.” Thus estrangement is not only the product of “the responsible decisions of the individual person”—rather, estrangement is the “tragic element in man’s predicament, manifest from earliest infancy.”

**Dual Participation Complexified, and the Reciprocal.**

**Relative Transcendence of Humanity and Nature**
Above we mentioned that the notion of the dual participation of the human life and the divine life needs to be complexified given the third term, nature as a life process (later to be named Gaia). In detailing that complexification we will be directly setting the stage for the central chapter of this dissertation, in which we will develop Nature as an ontological concept. As of yet we have resisted defining the term, using it in its implicit ambiguity and gesturing in passing to the complex history of its use. Indeed, we have not directly said much more about nature than that for Tillich nature it is a life process and the expression of the infinitely creative ground of being. That is, we have been pre-critically using the term with a lower-case “n.” As such, the current chapter will be relatively short—as was pointed out above, Tillich’s direct discussions of nature are few, and our analysis is therefore mercifully brief.

God, nature, and the human interpenetrate—each participates in the other two, and the other two participate in each. *God participates in the human being* insofar as the human being is a concrete manifestation of the divine creativity of the power of being. *The human participates in the divine life* for the same reason, from the other direction—and also because the human experience is a central element in the divine experience, and insofar as the spiritual union with the divine is the re-union of the divine with itself on the other side of separation. *Nature participates in the human being* insofar as the human being is one concrete instance of natural fecundity, insofar as the human being takes its sustenance and material reality from nature, and insofar as the human species is a product of the natural process of evolution. *The human being participates in nature* for the same reasons, from the other direction—and also because the human being, in its activity, affects and alters nature. *God participates in nature* in the same way that God
participates in the human being, insofar as nature is a concrete manifestation of the divine creativity of the power of being. *Nature participates in the divine life* just as the human does, but on a more encompassing level, as the arena not only of human experience but of all experience whatsoever.

In all of these reciprocal participations, it must always be stressed that God transcends both nature and the human being *utterly*. Nature transcends the human being relatively. Nature is still finite, yet nature is more encompassing than any individual human life or the life of the species as such. Indeed, this is a key source of the anxiety of meaninglessness with which existentialism struggles—the human species occupies such a miniscule corner of nature. As Nietzsche so famously put the point:

> Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.29

Still, one could argue—and Tillich does argue—that in some key ways the human being, in self-awareness and freedom, transcends nature. “In nature destiny has the character of necessity,” Tillich writes, and, “Dynamics reaches out beyond nature only in man.”30 Hence we speak of reciprocal, relative transcendence. God transcends utterly. Nature and the human transcend each other reciprocally but only ever relatively.

Certainly non-human animals display spontaneity but not the intentional, projecting deliberation characteristic of true human freedom, while the human being, as Tillich maintains, is not only centered but consciously self-centering, self-transcendent in
the exercise of freedom: “the psychological center offers its own contents to the unity of
the personal center. This happens through deliberation and decision. In doing so it
actualizes its own potentialities, but in actualizing its own potentialities, it transcends
itself.” Further, many particular natural processes are characterized by necessity—
water does not flow down-hill. Yet the process of nature as it is manifested in freedom
and spontaneity reveals both necessity and self-transcendence. Human freedom is
nature’s freedom. Moreover, as we will argue in Part Three, the process of evolution can
be read as a paradigm example of the self-transcendence of nature. Finally, the human is
as an expression not only of the creativity of the divine life but as an expression of the
fecundity of that nature through which the divine creativity flows into the human being—
the life of the universe no less than the divine life finds its fulfillment in the spiritual
return of the human being. This is the meaning of Tillich’s claim that nature participates
in salvation. In nature the creative human experience finds its venue, and the human
drama as a whole provides the venue for the development of nature’s self-awareness.
Hence we speak of the reciprocal, relative transcendence of nature and the human.

Importantly, though, this relative, reciprocal transcendence is possible on two
conditions. First, and crucially, nature and the human are able to transcend each other
specifically because they participate in each other, as the above considerations show.
Second, both are related in a situation of dual participation with that which transcends
and grounds them both—the infinite ground of being. And if nature participates in the
Fall through dual participation with humanity, so too does it participate in the New
Being: “The interdependence of everything with everything else in the totality of being
includes a participation of nature in history, and demands a participation of the universe in salvation.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus are Tillich’s panentheistic tendencies brought to their fullest expression in his interpretation of the symbols of Fall and salvation, as much as they are in his idea of creation. Interdependence and dual participation are predicated of nature along with humanity—nature, with the human being, is the expression of divine creativity, the self-manifestation of being-itself. And the human, it cannot be forgotten, is a product of nature most directly. Thus it makes sense to say that nature, like the human being, is created “in the image” of God: “Man is the image of God in that in which he differs from all other creatures, namely, his rational structure,” Tillich writes, continuing, “in him the ontological elements are complete and united on a creaturely basis, just as they are complete and united in god as the creative ground. Man is the image of god because his \textit{logos} is analogous to the divine \textit{logos}.”\textsuperscript{33} Yet in nature—in the universe apart from the human (a problematic notion that is central to the very concept of nature, as we shall see)—“reality itself has a logos character.”\textsuperscript{34} As we have seen, this is a condition of the possibility for human reason’s ability to grasp and shape reality at all.

While it would certainly be stretching beyond responsible speculation to suggest that the universe as such is a creature in any relevant sense, nature is a life process, and it can be argued that nature is centered in the centering act of the human being. Furthermore, in Part Three we will argue that the earth, Gaia, can be said to be a \textit{Gestalt} in the sense that it is a “self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, and self-continuing” living whole.\textsuperscript{35} And if this is what it means to be a creature in Tillich’s use of the term—which it would be difficult to deny—then Gaia is an organism centered in the human.
She both relatively, reciprocally transcends the human being and is centered in the human being. She can truly be said to be created in the image of God.
Notes

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 3:12.
7. Ibid., 3: 12, 16, 19, 20.
11. Ibid., 57.
12. Ibid., 58. c.f., Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3:18.
13. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3:34.
17. Ibid., 3:15.
22. Ibid., 4.
24. Ibid., 2:43.

25. Ibid., 2:29.

26. Ibid., 2:33.

27. Ibid., 2:43.

28. Ibid., 2:41.


31. Ibid., 3:27.

32. Ibid., 3:96.

33. Ibid., 1:259.

34. Ibid., 1:75.

35. Ibid., 3:20.
CHAPTER V:
NATURE AS AN ONTOLOGICAL CONCEPT

This technical civilization, the pride of mankind, has brought about a tremendous devastation of original nature, of the land, of animals, of plants. It has kept genuine nature in small reservations and has occupied everything for domination and ruthless exploitation. And worse: many of us have lost the ability to live with nature. We fill it with the noise of empty talk, instead of listening to its many voices, and, through them, to the voiceless music of the universe. Separated from the soil by a machine, we speed through nature, catching glimpses of it, but never comprehending its greatness or feeling its power. Who is still able to penetrate, meditating and contemplating, the creative ground of nature? A Chinese emperor asked a famous painter to paint a picture of a rooster for him. The painter assented, but said that it would take a long time. . . . Finally, after ten years of concentration on the nature of the rooster, he painted the picture—a work described as an inexhaustible revelation of the divine ground of the universe in one small part of it, a rooster. Compare the emperor's wise patience and the painter's saintly contemplation of an infinitely small expression of the divine life, with the exuberances of our contemporaries, who rush in their cars to some famous view and exclaim, "How lovely!" referring, no doubt, not to the view, but to their own appreciation of beauty. What blasphemy of the glory of nature! and consequently of the divine ground, the glory of which sounds through the glory of nature.

Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations

The Concept in Question

This chapter is the central chapter of the project, not simply in terms of placement but as the axis around which the rest turns. In Part One, we constructively analyzed Tillich’s theological ontology, seeking the conceptual tools to understand the concept of Nature theologically and ontologically. In the first chapter of the current part—Chapter IV—we saw that although Tillich only rarely writes of nature and never systematically explores Nature as a concept, we can affirm that he considers the idea of Nature in terms of what we named his doctrine of dual participation, where Nature is “the expression of the infinite ground of all things.”¹ In the next chapter we will consider the implications of reading the concept of Nature in Tillichian terms and compare and contrast a
panentheistic, Tillichian theology so formulated with other conventional sorts of religious naturalism. Finally, in Part Three, we will correlate the concept of Nature here formulated with the symbol, Gaia, in terms of James Lovelock’s Gaia theory. Hence, the concept of Nature to be developed in this Chapter V is central.

But if the concept is so central to the project, the development of the concept is also fraught with peril. First, the idea has a long history, and to ignore that history, assuming that we have always meant the same thing when we have said “nature,” “natura,” or “physis” is foolish in the extreme. Nor, indeed, can we even assume that we have meant and always now mean the same thing when we say “nature” in English, for not only does the term have its own history but it is ambiguous in its very meaning, whatever the language. That ambiguity is in fact productive and central to the term as such, a point that we will need to discuss. Finally, due to the history and ambiguity of the term, an attempt to develop a workable philosophical account of the concept must take as its touchstone the theoretical, intellectual, and social implications of the scientific revolution.

In fact, the “average-everyday” concept of nature as we inherit it in the modern West, we will show, truly is a product of that revolution. As David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb claim:

In a sense, as Bill McKibben bleakly argued, nature has “ended.” Having altered the atmosphere by thinning the ozone, affected global weather patterns, extinguished species at a rate unknown for tens of millions of years and consciously created new ones, we have put an end to that relatively autonomous realm. Of course every breath, hut building, and berry picking alters “nature.” But the global effects of what we have done over the last century or so are monumentally larger than anything we might have dreamed of before. . . . Thus, at least on Earth, nature as we have known it is gone. In its place is “the environment.” Every tree and river, large mammal and small fish, now exists in relation to human action, knowledge, science, technology . . .
Though the point is well taken, we will not replace the word “nature” with “environment”—instead, we seek to recover the sense of the word precisely in its ambiguity and thus suggest that the realm has never been as “autonomous” as we have thought. Rather, as our reading of Tillich has suggested, a deep and thoroughgoing complex of dual participations and creative, existential separation constitutes the realm as such.

To illustrate this we will need to show that the concept arises from the subject-object structure of experience, which itself is a product of existential estrangement. Specifically, and producing the ambiguity essential to the term in its various senses, Nature simultaneously is that of which we are a part and that from which we are apart. Throughout this chapter, then, we will take each of these difficulties in turn. First, we will consider the common, “average-everyday” use of the term and look at how the contemporary theologian Alister McGrath has unpacked that understanding. Second, we will (very) briefly trace the history of the concept, specifically from its Greek origins through the decisive change that occurred in the seventeenth century. Third, we will consider that change ontologically and existentially through a discussion of Heidegger’s views of technology and science—for, though Tillich did not systematically consider the topic Heidegger did, and we have already seen the influence Heidegger’s way of thinking had on Tillich. Finally, we will be in a position to show that the concept is a product of existential estrangement, and develop a sense of the concept that fully exploits that understanding.

Since the use of the term is so complex and so easily slides between senses, we will need to briefly consider our use of the word as a word. Specifically, we must
distinguish three uses. First, we refer to the word as a word, “nature.” To distinguish this use we will mark off the word with quotes—for example, where above we wrote, “we will not replace the word ‘nature’ with ‘environment’.” Second, we refer to uses of the term as a concept in a less than developed sense, in its “average-everydayness” or in the writings of another. To distinguish this use we will use the word with a lower-case “n”—for example, when we wish to write that “the Greeks saw the world of nature as possessing its own intelligence.” Finally, we will refer to a fully developed, ontological and existential concept. To distinguish this use we will use the word with an upper-case “N”—for example, where we suggest something like, “Both Man and Nature conceptually constitute each other in the primordial act of separation.”

The Common Understanding of Nature

Even in the common sense of the term, nature is a constructed and ambiguous concept. The contemporary scientist and theologian Alister E. McGrath has suggested a few incompatible ways in which nature is seen in the common understanding: as “a mindless force” demanding to be tamed, as “a wild kingdom,” and as “a supply depot.” Elsewhere, in the first volume of his three volume Scientific Theology entitled simply Nature, McGrath has delineated three related definitions:

1. Used as a realist concept, “nature” refers to the structures, processes, and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, and are studied by the natural sciences.
2. Used as a metaphysical concept, “nature” demotes a category which allows humanity to posit its distinctive nature and identity in relation to the non-human.
3. Used as a “surface” concept, the term refers to ordinarily observable features of the world. This is perhaps the most widely used sense of the term in modern ecological discourse, in which a contrast is often drawn between nature and an urban or industrialized environment, often to highlight how nature has been violated . . .
Here we see some related themes beginning to circle each other, and they will continue to do so: the mindless “wild,” the “physical world,” human nature and the “non-human,” and the contrast between nature and the urban, the civilized, and the industrial. None of these alone is “the” definition of nature—rather, it is in and through the play of these various senses that the concept arises.

In fact the search for the definition of such an inherently slippery and ambiguous term seems a fool’s game—as indeed it is, and we will not attempt it. We will, however, look to the common understanding of the term to begin to dig beneath it, seeking the ontological and existential conditions that make the concept meaningful in the modern West. Interestingly, the first online dictionary definition Google provides shows two things: first, that the cluster of ideas at play can be found there; second, that the term is in fact extremely broad, ambiguous, and variable:

**nature** [ney-cher] –noun
1. the material world, especially as surrounding humankind and existing independently of human activities. 2. the natural world as it exists without human beings or civilization. 3. the elements of the natural world, as mountains, trees, animals, or rivers. 4. natural scenery. 5. the universe, with all its phenomena. 6. the sum total of the forces at work throughout the universe. 7. reality, as distinguished from any effect of art . . . 8. the particular combination of qualities belonging to a person, animal, thing, or class by birth, origin, or constitution; native or inherent character . . . 9. the instincts or inherent tendencies directing conduct . . . 10. character, kind, or sort . . . 11. characteristic disposition; temperament . . . 12. the original, natural, uncivilized condition of humankind. 13. the biological function or the urges to satisfy their requirements. 14. a primitive, wild condition; an uncultivated state. 15. a simple, uncluttered mode of life without the conveniences or distractions of civilization . . . 16. . . . a prose work (1836), by Ralph Waldo Emerson, expounding transcendentalism. 17. *Theology*. the moral state as unaffected by grace. 18. by nature, as a result of inborn or inherent qualities; innately . . . 19. in a state of nature, a. in an uncivilized or uncultured condition. b. without clothes; nude; naked. 20. of/in the nature of, having the character or qualities of . . .
This is an instance in which reading a dictionary definition can be useful, and even interesting. We see fully twenty separate entries—but we also see that they tend to circle around our basic themes. The human and the non-human, and the contrast between them, are central. Civilization is contrasted with the uncultivated, the instinctual, and the wild. The idea of observable phenomena repeats, and the idea of nature as the material is primary. The idea that nature is somehow that which makes a thing the thing that it is, with its “inborn disposition” comes up more than once. And, perhaps most interesting, the term as an adjective is used to define the term as a noun: “the natural world as it exists without human beings or civilization,” “the elements of the natural world, as mountains, trees, animals, or rivers,” “natural scenery,” and “the original, natural, uncivilized condition of humankind.”

Hence, let us first look to this related cluster of ideas so that we can sketch out what is at play in the concept of Nature according to the dialectical dynamic at play between Man and Nature—their primordial unity, the existential condition of their separation, and their conceptual, religious re-union. In its most general and basic sense, the concept of nature tends to fold together four related notions under two basic categories: (1) nature as the essential and (2) nature as observable. Historically, “nature” has been used in at least four crucially important ways, corresponding to two basic categorical types.

In the first type of way the term has been employed, nature is discussed in terms of “essence,” or the inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing. Of course “essence” has its own place in Tillich’s ontology, deriving from both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Irrespective of the degree to which his discussions follow either
philosopher, irrespective of the degree to which its use can cause confusion (as Thatcher claims), it is important for our purposes that we not confuse the ontological concept of Nature with the ontological concept of essence as Tillich understands it. Just so, a second, more classically theological sense of the term used in this first sense must be separated out—this concerns the idea of humanity’s “natural” state as distinguished from a state of grace. Not only does this understanding carry with it theological baggage beyond the scope of this project, but it can only introduce confusion into our attempt to articulate “Nature” as an ontological concept.

In the second way the term has been used, another understanding of nature has been historically prevalent, and it is this understanding which should be finessed. “Nature” in this a sense concerns the observable phenomena of the material universe, and is generally contrasted both with human artifice and the “supernatural.” (Of course Tillich rejects both supernaturalism and a pantheism which would identify God with the cosmos.) In any case, this understanding of the term—referring to the observable phenomena of the material universe—commonly includes the “material” substance of the universe (however this may be defined), the physical constitutions and drives of organisms, and the forces controlling the physical phenomena that are observed. It is from this understanding that the final, most common and most general sense of the term is derived: “nature,” in this sense, means everything apart from the “artificial,” the man-made (and, of course, apart from the “supernatural”). “Nature” in this sense, therefore, does not possess those attributes which are specifically, particularly, and essentially human—hear echoes of the first sense of the term shading the fourth. That is, nature is held to be deterministic, not free, and mindless, not conscious and certainly not self-
conscious. Here the second, theological sense shades this fourth sense, insofar as is precisely because humans are created in the image of God that we are free and conscious, according to classical theism.

Note again, however, how the second use of the term shades the first—and vice versa—specifically in terms of essence. For in the second sense we find that our inherited drives and biological impulses—inherited from evolution and through genetics—go a long way toward making us the persons that we are. Thus, when we say, “It is in his nature to drink too much,” or, “She is just cheerful by nature,” both senses of the term are at play. His and her nature—his and her biological inheritance—and the essence of who each one is as the people that they are, work together both ambiguously and productively. Just so, we can speak of “realizing one’s nature” in terms of perfecting those essential, “natural” tendencies, and we often speak so in moral terms. And, finally, this whole complex of conceptual co-determinations shades the theological idea, as when we speak of human nature as sinful, violent, jealous, and in need of redemption. Biologically and essentially as human we are sinful, goes the story, and we need to be saved from our own natures. It is not the point here to delineate all of the various nuances of the interplay of the four basic senses of the term—still, this brief consideration serves to show how they are all wrapped up together in a productive ambiguity.

This fundamental ambiguity, and the self-referencing shadings between the four primary meanings of the term, is crucial to our analysis. On the one hand, it is important to make clear that the term “essence” must be maintained as a technical ontological concept and that, where we seek to render “Nature” as another technical ontological
concept, we must be careful not to conflate the two. Of course, in so doing we cannot forget the overlap and reciprocal shading that the various senses of the term have historically involved. Hence, it is with the second type—nature as not-human and not-God—that our analysis can most productively work. This work will need to proceed on at least three fronts: First, we must show how the concept can be constituted through an understanding that it (a) partakes of the determining self-world, subject-object structures, and (b) is fundamentally a product of the existential estrangement which these structures make necessary. Second, we must show precisely how it is that this ontological and existential constitution of the concept leads directly to the fundamental ambiguity at the concept’s heart. Third and finally, we will need to show that Nature, as a sufficiently articulated and grounded ontological concept, points to the unifying concept of being-itself—this will be accomplished by pointing to the polar structure of being that is re-instantiated in the contrast between Man and Nature, and how the concept of infinity allows us to again dialectically unify the contrast.

Before continuing with the analysis, let us again stop to make a point concerning terminology. First, we will need to develop the concept of Nature in terms of an ontological polar contrast, while still reserving the word “nature” in all its linguistic ambiguity. Just so, when we formulate the polarity as the Man-Nature contrast, we are intentionally using “Man” as the other term of the contrast, rather than the gender-neutral “human” we would otherwise employ. This is intended to convey the modernist sense of “man” as the object of scientific knowledge, the organizer of that knowledge, and the master of nature, evoking the modern project of reason and Foucault’s claim that “man” is a recent invention, a product of the modernist project.6
Furthermore, not only does the term “nature” ambiguously shift between essentialist and materialist meanings, but even in the second sense it contains a fundamental and productive ambiguity. This takes us straight to the heart of the concept and is crucial to our discussion. On the one hand, nature refers to wilderness, to the determining laws governing the functioning of the cosmos—that is, that realm of reality conceptually constituted by being distinguished from the products of human artifice. On the other hand, as organisms, as biological entities, humans clearly are part of nature. Hence Nature is both that from which we come and that from which we distinguish ourselves. As beings that possess freedom and reason, we see ourselves in our “essential nature” as standing apart from the unreasoning, deterministic, threatening “wild.” This ambiguity, based in separation, I will argue, can be situated squarely in Tillich’s ontological schema by showing it to be a product of the existential estrangement produced by finitely occupying the self-world structure. As such, the Man-Nature contrast clearly partakes of that structure, and belongs to the fundamental condition of humanity. First, however, let us briefly consider the history of the concept with two touchstones—the Greek idea of nature and the new understanding inherent in the scientific revolution.

_A Brief History of the Concept_

In the next section of this chapter we will consider Heidegger’s understanding of technology and science as modes of the revealing of the real, and use that as a way into our consideration of Nature as an ontological concept. That discussion, however, takes for granted the shift in the idea of nature that accompanied the scientific revolution. As
such, it will benefit us to briefly contrast the Greek origins of the concept as it is understood in the Western tradition with the changes that concept underwent in the seventeenth century. This story will be woefully incomplete—it will, for instance, entirely ignore the medieval idea of nature. The current project is not so much to undertake a history of the idea, for which task others on the committee would be much better suited in any case, but to make some broad suggestions concerning the origin of the concept in Greek philosophy and in modern science.

Nature and the Ancient Greeks

According to the excellent essay on the topic by Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, upon which I will be drawing extensively for this section, the idea of “the naturalness of natural phenomena . . . had to be invented,” and it was invented in a “context of polemic.” The idea was absent from the earliest Greek writings, Lloyd claims, and while the concept was confused and arbitrarily used when it entered philosophical writings it was used very precisely in medical writings. This is a fascinating point: if the views of the earliest philosophers are difficult to ascertain and even “bewildering,” this was not the case for the earliest medical writers. “One principal context in which nature comes to be invoked in the medical writers is in relation to the claim that all diseases are natural,” Lloyd tells us. “Some of the Hippocratic writers flatly denied that gods or demons had anything to do with diseases or their cures.” These writings took place in the context of a debate concerning rival medical traditions, varieties of “religious medicine,” and the right to practice medicine, and they were of pressing concern since they involved appeals to clients. Interestingly, then, Lloyd notes that the appeal to nature to deny the
involvement of the supernatural in disease—which most today would consider simply good sense—was invoked both “on some occasions when something like a plausible explanatory theory was available” and also on grounds that were “quite fanciful” and even “imaginary.”

Thus the earliest uses of the concept of nature arose in the context of an “attempt to defeat whole classes of opponents by invoking a category of the natural that ruled out what is contrary to nature.” And this took place with the effect that “the Greeks’ expressed confidence that everything had its nature and its causes generally lived uneasily with a fundamentally shaky grasp of what these actually were.” Of course, this was related to a fundamentally shaky grasp of what nature is—though the explanations might have been wrong, “at least their explanations were of the right type” … at least insofar as the explanations denied supernatural causes for disease. Still,

More immediately, the invocation of the category of the natural . . . depends, for its plausibility, on having a reasonably clear answer to what that category included. At first sight the answer must be everything, where “everything” ranges over all material objects, their properties and characteristics . . . and that was the answer the philosophers needed to squeeze out the category of the supernatural. But of course in the sphere of human behavior phusis was regularly opposed to its standard antonym, nomos, concerning customs and conventions as well as laws.

Hence the invocation of the category of nature, used to cover all material objects and their properties, reveals two fundamental distinctions: the natural/supernatural distinction and the natural/human distinction, distinctions that developed quite organically, not to say naturally.

We can immediately see that the concept, even in its origin, involves “metaphysical and philosophical assumptions that underlie the various competing and conflicting Greek conceptions of nature.” Thus the situation that obtains today obtained
in the birth of the concept. It is not the case that there is or ever was a single, standard concept of nature—rather, there have always been “various conflicting and competing” concepts of nature, developed organically in the context of inquiry and debate. Yet, then as now, the concept reveals underlying metaphysical assumptions that contrast material reality—nature—to the supernatural and to human custom and artifice. Thus, while Plato and Aristotle disagreed on so much concerning nature—and much else—both assumed that “the natures of things included their goals, the good they fulfill or actualize,” bringing together senses (1) and (2) of the concept. Just so, they both agreed, as Collingwood explains, that somehow “a plant or animal, according to their ideas, participates in its own degree psychically in the life process of the world’s ‘soul’ and intellectually in the activity of the world’s ‘mind’, no less than it participates materially in the physical organization of the world’s ‘body’.”

The point here is that we can see that the concept of nature “was forged in controversy, notably as the underpinning to the claims by new styles of wisdom in their attempts to outbid more traditional kinds.” Thus, as McGrath notes, the term is “socially mediated” even in its origin, “not an objective entity in its own right.” Furthermore, the concept is, as such, entirely Western in origin. For example, as Lloyd notes, ancient Chinese texts show “no less than six primary concepts as well as several further subsidiary ones” only rightly corresponding to “what we call nature.” This is not to say that no other culture shares a sense of the beauty and power of nature, but that the particular cluster of assumptions and dichotomies the concept unites have their beginning in the very origin of Western philosophy. In particular, these involve the idea
immediately present reality as material, the separation of the natural from the supernatural, and the separation of human culture and artifice from nature.

**Nature and Science**

If the origin of the concept is Western, then the distinctive meaning of the concept for the present age is just as Western, rooted in the unique and powerful understanding of reality that characterized the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. The rise of science has had a number of well-documented effects—socially, politically, religiously, and philosophically. Arguments about the nature and extent of those effects abound, and it is not our intention to fuel those here. What most can agree on, though, is that “it was the new view of physical reality, the new conception of nature, which constituted this epoch,” as the historian of science Richard S. Westfall claims. What, then, constitutes this “new conception of nature” that has been so powerful?—for it is the view of nature that shapes our contemporary understanding of nature, the protests of romantic poets and existentialists of all stripes notwithstanding. According to Westfall, the modern concept of nature can be understood under four headings: “During the scientific revolution nature was quantified; it was mechanized; it was perceived to be other; it was secularized.”

The quantification and the mechanization of nature are related. That nature is quantified means that one of the fundamental features of reality is that it can be measured. This, of course, relegates vast regions of experience in principle outside of reality. Previous discussions of nature tended to lack this element, considering nature in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. The new scientists were self-consciously measurers, developing new techniques for measurement in all fields. But it is in
intentionally approaching nature as a machine that the new science was most self-aware. “In no part of its new approach to nature was the age more fully self-conscious,” writes Westfall, than in the mechanization of nature. As we have discussed above, this is a clear departure from the Greek idea, which, though it made human beings a special part of nature, and distinguished *phasis* from *nomos* and *techné*, still saw nature as possessed of mind and soul—that is, in organic terms.

For the new scientists, however, nature “yielded to mechanical explanation with relative ease. Perhaps it was in its approach to living organisms that the new conception revealed itself most clearly. Where before physical nature had been conceived in terms suitable to the organic, now life was reduced to particles of matter in motion.” This is an interesting turn of phrase, suggesting that modern science approached the organic in terms unsuitable to it. Certainly the Greeks would have thought so, for the model of matter in motion interacting in deterministic fashions relegates the operations of mind and soul to a realm apart from nature. This is a decisive moment, for where the Greeks saw human beings as special parts of nature—but still parts of nature—the mechanization of nature makes that which is central to the human experience—mind—incompatible to the new view of nature.

This, then, takes the tendency to separate human artifice and culture from nature to its furthest extreme: nature is mechanical, deterministic matter-in-motion—mind is not matter, and thus mind, the hallmark of the human, is apart from nature. This cannot be overstated, for where nature-as-essence put the essence of the human in (uneasy) relation to its source in the natural world, the modern mechanism separated the two. There was now not a single, eternal nature (as with Aristotle), nor even changing appearance.
ordered by eternal forms accessible to contemplation of appearance (as with Plato) but
*res extensa, res cogitans*, and God, all ontologically distinct.

Of course the measuring and mechanizing tendencies of modern science give rise
seemingly by necessity to the conception of nature as other—this is a ready implication
of the separation of what is essentially human from a dead, cold world of matter in
motion. This, in turn, gives over into the secularization of nature. Much has been made
of this, and the meaning and extent of the implications of the battle between science and
faith that erupts when the earth is displaced from the center of the universe continues to
be debated. For Westfall, this “secularization” is simply a matter of the authority to
determine truth. On its face, of course, the suggestion that the Church has its sphere of
truth and the scientists theirs seems workable—in fact, however, it was not only the
Church that over-extended their claims from the point of view of the other.

The secularization of nature does not necessarily mean that nature is emptied of
the divine, as so many have assumed—though the mechanization of nature certainly
suggests that to many people, regardless of what scientists at the time thought. Rather,
the secularization of nature as Westfall describes it hinges on what counts as evidence,
even evidence for the existence of God. “One after another,” Westfall writes, English
scientists in the seventeenth century took up pen “to demonstrate the existence of God.”
When they did so, however, they did not examine the contents of the concept of God, as
Anselm did—rather, “they called upon the latest findings of science to frame their
arguments.”23 And, in effect, the scientific revolution finally “severed the cord that had
bound the study of nature in Europe to Christianity during the previous millennium.”24
This, in turn, had deep religious implications. As McGrath writes, the secularization of nature meant that the world was explainable on its own terms: “The world could explain its properties with reference to itself, rather than require the invocation of God,” McGrath explains. While “God may well have created the world, there was no further need for divine involvement in its government or explanation.”

Thus, for Newton, the “primary and overwhelming function of God” was the “maintenance of the regular operation of nature.” Nor was it only scientists who accepted this change in the locus of authority. Within a century of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino’s condemnation of Galileo’s Copernican understanding of the motion of the heavens on the basis that “it was inconsistent with the overt meaning of certain passages in scripture,” the Reverend Thomas Burnet and Isaac Newton reversed the order: “Instead of using scripture to decide what is true in science, they used science, knowledge they had drawn from the consideration of nature, to judge what was true in scripture”—specifically regarding the symbolic character of the creation accounts in Genesis!

**Heidegger’s Treatment of the Question**

Neither of these views of nature—the Greek or the scientific—is necessary, though the success of the latter is so overwhelming as to make it seem necessary and objective even to those who should know better. “Far from being a ‘given’,” as McGrath writes, however, “the idea of nature is shaped by the prior assumptions of the observer. One does not ‘observe’ nature; one constructs it.” Of course this is central to the concept—as we will show by the end of this chapter, the concept is a product of the separation between subject and object that makes observation as such possible. It is not a
necessary product, for it is an historical and contextual concept, but it is a view that has become “the very foundation of intellectual life in the West and increasingly in the whole world.” Nature just is the (nonhuman) world to which humans belong, understood in a particular way as a specific result of that basic, existential separation—the content of the concept, changeable and ambiguous, is a social and historical construction. Yet we so easily forget the origins and context of our concepts due to familiarity, as Nietzsche and Heidegger have so powerfully shown. Thus we turn now to Heidegger’s account of the existential and ontological meanings of a cluster of related concepts that inform our idea of nature—most notably technology and science, for if our understanding of nature is a product of science, and technology is that on the basis of which we explicitly distinguish ourselves from nature, it is important to consider those ideas in some depth.

**Technology**

For Heidegger, technology represents a mode of beings coming into being. That is, technology is a way that the real—or in Tillich’s terms we could probably say Being-itself—reveals itself in and through human beings. What does this mean? To begin to answer this, Heidegger holds that we need to ask after the essence of technology. As we saw above, “essence” points in some way to what a thing is in terms of what guides it to be (and to become) the thing that it is as it is. Thus, William Lovitt explains, essence “does not simply mean what something is, but . . . the way in which something pursues its course, the way in which it remains through time as what it is.” So, Heidegger asks, what is technology and how does it pursue its course?
As to what technology is, Heidegger says, “Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together.”

Manufacture, the use of equipment, the use of what is manufactured through the use of equipment, and—especially important—“the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology.”

This conception of technology Heidegger calls the “instrumental and anthropological definition,” and it is true as far as it goes—but it does not get to the essence of technology. For that we need to ask: “Within what do such things as means and ends belong?”

To begin with, Heidegger writes, we must recognize that means and ends belong within a way of viewing the world guided primarily by cause-and-effect thinking. Commenting on the Aristotelian understanding of cause and effect—the formal cause, the material cause, the efficient cause, and the final cause—he asks: What unifies “the causal character of the four causes?” First, “The four causes are ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else.” Second, that which “is above all responsible,” Heidegger calls “circumscribing.”

“Circumscribing gives bounds to the thing. With the bounds the thing does not stop; rather from out of them it begins to be what, after production it will be.” Thus, taking Aristotle’s example of the silver chalice as his own, Heidegger explains that the ways of being responsible, including the silversmith’s gathering of the other three causes, are united by the fact that they let the thing “come forth into presencing”—or, they help “bring it into appearance” in a “bringing forth.” And if we ask out of what and into what the thing is brought forth
into appearance we can only answer with Tillich: out of nonbeing and into being. This, then, begins to give content to what Heidegger means when he says that technology is a mode of beings coming into being and a revelation of the real in and through and to human beings. But of course technology is not the only—or even the primary—mode of the revealing of the real.

Bringing-forth in general, Heidegger writes, was named poiesis by the Greeks—who, we recall, invented the idea of the “naturalness of natural phenomena.” According to Lovitt, this concept encapsulates production, generation, begetting, uttering, and eliciting. Physis—the Greek word usually translated “nature”—Heidegger says represented poiesis in the highest sense: “For what presences by means of physis has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself.” That is, it is its own efficient cause. “In contrast, what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g., the silver chalice, has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another.” This, of course, means two things. First, that, for Heidegger at least, the bringing-forth that has its efficient cause in itself—physis, translated as “nature”—is not the same as the bringing-forth that has its efficient cause in another—techné, translated as craft, art, or technology. Second, however, both technology and nature share a common characteristic—that they are modes of bringing-forth or coming into appearance of the real.

Thus, in bringing-forth—poiesis—both “the growing things of nature” and the products of human artifice are coming out of nonbeing and into being. Technology is one mode of the bringing-forth of being, and all appearance is unified as the bringing-forth of beings into being. Yet the growing things of nature have their bursting open in
themselves while the products of technology have theirs through another, meaning that in the unity of both modes of appearance as bringing-forth there is a fundamental separation at play. Both nature and technology are unified insofar as both are modes of the coming to being of the real—or, in Tillichian terms, technology does not begin with human beings but is a mode of the coming to being of Being-itself working through human activity—but nature and technology are separated in terms of the proximal source of the bringing forth. Above we wrote of the way in which all organisms, all individual forms of life, have a good of their own in moral terms—here the moral is revealed in its ontological ground, for the silver chalice does not have a good of its own, but only a purpose in a web of meanings, means, and ends.

Yet, still, as has always been the case in the above considerations, the unity is primordial to the separation. The source of bringing-forth Heidegger calls alēthelia, revealing, and writes that “every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing.” And thus, he writes, bringing-forth “gathers within itself the four modes” of causality, and hence within its domain “belong ends and means, belong instrumentality.” He concludes: “Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.” And what is revealed? Again we can answer in Tillich’s terms: what is revealed is Being-itself in and through the coming into actuality of potentiality. This, it seems, is what Heidegger means when he suggests that the Real reveals itself in appearance, whether through nature—through the bursting open of entities in themselves—or in technology.

Techné—as a mode of the revealing of the Real with an efficient cause in human activity—is perennial. Though the term we translate as “technology,” contrasted with physis, which we translate as “nature,” is Greek, and although the cluster of metaphysical
assumptions underlying the idea of the naturalness of natural phenomena arose in a specifically Greek intellectual context, the fact that humans gather the formal, material, and the final causes into new things in a web of means-end relations is universal and central to what it means to be human. But as we have seen, the idea of what it means for natural phenomena to be natural changed radically with the scientific revolution, and the success story of the application of technology follows directly from that change. Thus, though *technē* and modern technology share a common essence in being a specific mode of the coming into appearance of being, modern technology is a new and dominating force in the world. In fact it is the dominating success of the technological application of modern science that makes modern scientific thinking, as Westfall says, “the very foundation of intellectual life in the West and increasingly in the whole world.”

Thus Heidegger asks, “Of what essence is modern technology that it happens to think of putting exact science to use?” And how is it different from *technē*? For Heidegger, the answer is that while both *physis* and *technē* were modes of *poiēsis*, or bringing-forth into appearance as a bursting open, “the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiēsis*.“ Rather, “The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging . . . which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.” Whereas earlier technologies, such as windmills and tilled soil, had maintained and ordered nature so as to provide a direction for its growth, challenging for Heidegger makes *demands* of nature. It *sets upon* nature in the manner of a violent attack.
“The setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature is an expediting,” he writes, “and in two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes.” To expedite means: to speed up the progress of; accelerate; to execute quickly and efficiently; to issue officially; to dispatch. Modern technology sets upon nature to order it not as a provision for its growth but to make its growth more efficient for specific human ends according to official dispatch. The challenge put to nature is always directed toward something other than the growth of nature—farmland is not ordered such that it simply provides for the directed growth of food as such, but for the ever accelerating and ever more efficient production of food as commodity, “driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense.” That this calculated drive gives no thought at all to nature apart from its use as a means toward the efficient production of a saleable commodity can be seen from a brief look at the well-documented, ecologically disastrous effects of modern, technological farming practices. These, of course, include soil erosion, depletion of water reserves, loss of genetic variety, pollution, and the dispersal of pesticides even into the human body.

All of this is directly antithetical to the appearance of being in the bursting open of nature in, through, and of itself. The soil, the mountain, the river, “even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command.”

This remains a way of revealing. Yet it is not the bursting-open appearance of poiēsis: “Unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing,” Heidegger writes. “But the revealing never simply comes to an end.” The silver chalice is fashioned and then put to use for its intended purpose. Even the flower grows, blooms, and thus appears, and though it grows and dies while it is there it is the thing that it is, purely and simply, appearing in and through that blossoming growth.
When the commoditized flower blooms, however, it is not purely and simply there—it is there as a commodity, not indeterminate because always regulated and secured, but also only as a means to an ongoing ordering, where the means and end blur together.

“Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering.” Nature is made into a “standing-reserve,” a store of resources—stock. Everything that is so challenged presences in this way, and only in this way.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Science}

Man accomplishes this—Man the maker, Man the orderer of things, Man the measure of all things… “But man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any time the Real shows itself or withdraws.” The challenging setting-upon characteristic of scientific technology is directly a product of the view of nature that came to hold sway in the wake of the success of the scientific revolution—a dead, material, desacralized, other—but Man is not the master of that mode of revealing. Rather, the human being is itself challenged in the coming to power of science: “Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing reserve?”\textsuperscript{52} Hence we speak of “human resources”—hence the forester is commanded by profit-making, whether by the lumber or tourist industries. The unconcealing that challenges is not a product of Man—indeed, Man the maker, Man the “transcendental subject that is also an empirical object,”\textsuperscript{53} Man the master of his world “has already been claimed by a way of
revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research.”\textsuperscript{54} Man is the driving force of the challenging in that it is in and through the human being that nature is set upon, but at the same time Man is a \textit{product} of the challenging. “That challenging,” as Heidegger puts it, “gathers man into ordering.”\textsuperscript{55}

The “challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing reserve” Heidegger names \textit{enframing}.\textsuperscript{56} Enframing is itself “nothing technological”—rather, it is “the way in which the Real reveals itself as standing reserve.”\textsuperscript{57} Here we are taken back to the panentheistic idea that all that is, is the self-manifestation of Being-itself. Even the violent way in which modern scientific technology sets upon nature to master it is a mode of the revelation, or appearance, of Being-itself. Hence, as we noted above, \textit{poiēsis} and challenging ordering, though in one way “fundamentally different,” still “remain related in their essence. . . . Both are ways of revealing.”\textsuperscript{58}

And, again, this mode of revealing is fundamentally connected to the picture of nature as developed in the scientific revolution. Yet just as the human being is the locus and driving force of this mode of revealing, the human being is also a product of that challenge, and so is the scientific mode of questioning a product of the challenging and ordering attitude:

Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. The reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way.\textsuperscript{59}
It must be important that this happened precisely in the West, so long dominated by Christianity. Indeed, Christianity has long taught that nature is there for human use. At the same time, however, even in the human drive to master nature the human is subject to the dynamic of the self-manifestation of Being-itself. As Heidegger is saying, the Real always reveals itself in, thorough, and to humanity. Thus in our deepest potentiality—in our essence—human beings necessarily belong to the revealing of the Real.

Furthermore, Heidegger is not suggesting that the scientific approach to nature cannot lead to correct conclusions about how reality is structured. In fact that is exactly what science does do. The correct and the true, however, are not the same thing for Heidegger: “the unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a calculable complex of the effects of forces can indeed permit correct determinations; but precisely through these successes the danger can remain that in the midst of all that is correct the true will withdraw.” For Heidegger the correct is a matter of the correspondence of ideas-as-representations to observations—hence science produces correct statements. The true, however—the “happening of revealing” whereby the real reveals itself in, through, and to the human being—is dependent upon the primordial unity that makes possible the division of subject and object requisite to correlating observation. That is, the true concerns precisely the recovery of the awareness of that primordial unity, while the success of the challenging ordering of both Man and Nature into correct statements obscures that unity. As the place where the Real can reveal itself—where Being-itself can come into self-manifestation and self-awareness—we are essentially united to the source of our being and existentially separated from that source, from other beings, and even from ourselves.
Nature as a Product of Existential Estrangement

We saw above that the structure of being is a dynamic dialectic, in which the power of being infinitely overcomes nonbeing in the self-manifestation of being-itself. This dynamic manifests in finite being, in which nonbeing is no longer a purely active ontological principle but a limiting, determining negativity, which creates the characteristic attribute of finitude: conditioned contingency. Again, the basic articulation of the structure of being is the Self-World structure, in which human beings have a self and have a world. While the self belongs to the world it is not the world—while the self is free from the world it is also conditioned by the world. It is the Self-World contrast that makes existence possible and that makes the ontological question pressing. The Self-World contrast is the condition of the possibility of the subject-object contrast, and hence the two together are the conditions for the possibility of existence, experience, and knowledge. We also saw that it is not simply the division of subject and object that makes knowledge possible, but—as Heidegger shows—more primordially the unity of subject and object in being. That is, the contrast makes knowledge possible, but only insofar as the contrast is grounded in a prior unity, and that contrast is reunited in the knowledge of truth that it makes possible. Of course, this is an expression of the dynamic dialectic which drives the divine life, and which continues to be re-instantiated at each level of the structure of being.

For many, if not most, modern human beings, their world simply is reality as revealed in science. Yet it is exactly for this reason that the relation of the modern human being to his or her world is one of alienation—for the scientific mode of revealing
depends upon the sharp contrast of subject and object to the denial of their primordial unity. The contrast is not necessarily a flaw—indeed, it gives rise to correct and powerful understanding—rather, the problem is that this is the only way in which our world is constituted to us; the primordial unity remains concealed. We see the world as dead, deterministic, material, and ourselves made into objects by the same challenging setting-upon. We are adrift and feel the danger of losing even the self in the Self-World pair. In fact this loss is ontologically impossible, but it can be experienced existentially as a result of the monological understanding of our world we have created.

Now, in these same terms, we posit another contrast instantiating the same dynamic: the Man-Nature contrast. The concept of Nature is directly a product of the existential estrangement so fundamental to human existence. Estrangement is itself a product of the ontological constitution of finite existence, in which being and nonbeing are mixed imperfectly. Existence, experience and knowledge are made possible by separation, according to which (relative) nonbeing is a principle of differentiation and otherness—but this constitutive separation of the human being from other human beings, from the world, and from God produces the experience of nonbeing manifested in anxiety, the ontological shock, and estrangement. That is, it is the transcendental awareness of separation that constitutes estrangement and is experienced in anxiety.

In Man’s consciousness of the world of which he is a part, then, he re-instantiates the separation of existence from its source—being-itself or God—in the conceptual constitution of Man as separate from and over against Nature. Moreover, just as human existence is both estranged from God and participates in the divine life (through the dual participation we named above), just as infinity encompasses and includes finitude even as
finitude separates itself from the infinite in its very constitution, so too does Man participate in and take his being from Nature even as he constitutes himself in terms of his estrangement from Nature. Both Man and Nature conceptually constitute each other in this primordial act of separation.

Just as being-itself grounds, incorporates, and transcends the power of being and nonbeing in the dynamic dialectic of the infinitely unifying divine life, Nature does the same on a lower level. Nature gives rise to the subject that separates itself from nature as both the biological and environmental precondition of the species and as the conditions for individual organic generation through genetics and the mechanisms of conception and birth. Hence the primordial unity of Man and Nature makes the contrast possible. Nature also gives rise to the subject conceptually, as the reality of the object from which he is separated—that which Man observes and utilizes is that from which Man separates himself in the very acts of observation and utilization. In that separation Man defines his identity as Man—that is as neither beast nor determined material process, but as free, rational, and inquiring—and in the same movement defines the Nature from which he is separate. Again, this is clearly an expression of the more primordial Self-World contrast, according to which the self is that being which finds itself thrown into a world that he must negotiate, learn about, strive to master or seek harmony with. Enframing takes this tendency to its extreme—it is the extreme progression of existential estrangement, the extreme result of the separating acts of observation made possible by the subject-object contrast.

So, while knowledge and experience require separation—hence Nature becomes objectified, as does Man himself when he becomes an object of inquiry—Man also
participates in Nature in a more fundamental way. He does so, however, on the ground of a still more primordial structure grounded in the unity of being-itself as the ground and necessary condition of the structure of being. Thus Nature as the unity from which Man separates himself is dependent on a deeper unity—Nature remains finite being, conditioned by and dependent upon that which is neither conditioned nor dependant, being-itself. This is why a pantheism that simply equates God with Nature cannot work—Nature is grounded in a God which transcends the self-world and Man-Nature structures.

So too must an idea of “naturalism” be formulated on this basis. A naturalistic theology need not simply reduce all of reality to inorganic matter deterministically regulated by impersonal forces and laws. Nor need it accept a methodological and epistemological philosophy of “causal closure.” The series of natural causes to which “causal closure” limits explanation is grounded in being-itself. Being-itself grounds, unifies, and incorporates a dynamic dialectical structure that includes an ontological principle we have named (following and interpreting Tillich) the “power of being.” This power of being, then, cannot simply be named another natural force, since it is the dynamic interplay of the power of being with nonbeing in the divine life which grounds and makes possible Nature and her forces in the first place. On the other hand, a naturalistic theology ontologically grounded in this way need make no appeal to “supernatural” forces, where supernatural is understood in the terms of a separation between finite beings and an infinite being—or, read in alternate terms, a separation between God and Nature. This formulation is also ruled out by the ontology, which
panentheistically describes God as incorporating and fully participating in Nature—as in all finite being—while still fully transcending it in God’s ultimate original unity.

Rather, this sort of naturalistic theology (or religious naturalism) seeks a path to the apprehension of the dynamic structure of the divine life in and through a consideration of Nature—in her form as wilderness, environment, biological interconnectedness, and all the rest—insofar as Nature herself can be seen as an expression of the dynamic of the divine life. Nature is that from which Man is estranged, right along with all his other ways of being estranged, and she is that from which Man takes his organic being. She is also that which unifies her own internal separation of Man from Nature, however, insofar as Man participates in Nature and Nature participates in Man. Nature participates in Man through evolution and wonder, and Man participates in Nature as a learner and a shaper.
Notes


6. See Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*.


8. Ibid., 6.


10. Ibid., 8.

11. Ibid., 9.

12. Ibid., 9–10, 12.

13. Ibid., 18.

14. Ibid.


20. Ibid., 65.

21. Ibid., 72.

22. Ibid., 74.
23. Ibid., 81.
24. Ibid., 82.
27. Ibid., 85 – 86.
31. Ibid., 4.
32. Ibid., 4 – 5.
33. Ibid., 5.
34. Ibid., 6.
35. Ibid., 7.
36. Ibid., 8.
37. Ibid., 9 – 10.
40. Ibid., 11.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 12.
45. Ibid., 15.


48. For only one example of such documentation, easily accessed through a sixty-second Google search, see “Ecological Impact of Modern Agriculture” by Judy Soule, et al: http://eap.mcgill.ca/DIAE_1.htm.


50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 17.

52. Ibid., 18.


55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., 23.

58. Ibid., 21.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 26.

61. Ibid., 25.
CHAPTER VI:
NATURE AS A RELIGIOUS IDEA

The power of being is not dead identity but the dynamic process in which it separates itself from itself and returns to itself. The more conquered separation there is the more power there is. The process in which the separated is reunited is love. The more reuniting love there is, the more conquered non-being there is, the more power of being there is. Love is the foundation, not the negation, of power.

Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*

**Religious Naturalism**

The analysis of the concept of Nature in terms of estrangement leads to the question of religious naturalism. That is, we have analyzed Nature conceptually in terms of Tillich’s ontology, while that ontology is necessarily part and parcel with Tillich’s theology. In Part Three we will correlate the ontological concept of Nature with a religious symbol, Gaia. In this final chapter of Part Two, then, it remains to make the link between the ontological concept and the religious symbol through a discussion of the religious import of the idea of Nature as we have developed it. Above we saw that, for Tillich, estrangement and sin are correlates—thus, estrangement as such carries religious implications.

Now, a growing option in the sort of contemporary religiosity that rejects supernaturalism but wishes to affirm the religious aspects of life is religious naturalism. It would seem that a religious view that accepts Tillich’s rejection of the supernatural and his sense of nature as an expression of divine creativity would easily express itself as religious naturalism. Yet we have also seen that Tillich rejects pantheism, which is the most common form of religious naturalism. Thus we will need to ask two questions in this chapter. First, we will want to ask the question of religious naturalism *per se.*
Toward that end we will use as a representative example of contemporary religious naturalism Loyal Rue’s presentation in his book, *Religion is Not About God*. We will then point to the shortcomings of that sort of religious naturalism from a Tillichian point of view. Second, we will want to ask the question of the way in which nature manifests as a religious idea. Toward that end we will begin by looking to certain symbolic presentations of nature and continue by considering the religious implications of Tillich’s understanding of estrangement as it relates to the concept of Nature.

Finally, we will reflect on the relation of human consciousness, as a product of (natural) evolution, to the life process of the natural world and to the divine life of which the natural world is an expression. This will involve a brief consideration of G. W. F. Hegel’s doctrine of the trinity, which Tillich develops in his own way. Specifically, we will suggest that the dialectic of primordial unity, separation, and reunion—which we discussed at length in Part One—entails the assertion that human consciousness (and, I would argue, consciousness as such) is the place in which divine self-awareness manifests itself. We will thus need to consider the way in which Tillich avoids Hegel’s absolutizing tendency. This will leave us in a position to begin developing the symbol of Gaia, according to which, we will argue in Part Three, consciousness as a natural phenomenon is the place where nature becomes aware of itself—and, as the natural world is the expression of divine creativity, consciousness as the product of evolution is the this-worldly self-awareness of the divine.

*The Question of Religious Naturalism*
To what degree does our development of the concept of Nature lead to religious naturalism? Or does it do so at all? Clearly, an understanding of Nature grounded in Tillichian ontology and theology will not appeal to any idea of a “supernatural realm.” In terms of natural phenomena it will tend to accept a sort of causal closure, whereby we need not look outside of the “natural” series of cause and effect for the explanation of natural phenomena—though certain provisions must be kept in mind on this last point.

Specifically, our “causal closure” does not involve a mechanistic materialism, which, as we have seen, is a remainder from the seventeenth century scientific revolution that contemporary views of nature seem to have difficulty shedding. Rather, we reject mechanistic materialism in favor of an organic model of natural processes, of which more will be said in Part Three. Often, the doctrine of causal closure is rejected because it is closely connected to the doctrine of scientism, the view that only scientific claims are meaningful. This claim is itself not a scientific claim and therefore, of course, if it is true it is not meaningful—since it is meaningful, however, it cannot be true. But the doctrine of causal closure, provisionally applied, need not devolve into naive scientism.

On the one hand, again, causal closure may be rejected on the grounds that it entails mechanistic materialism, which cannot account for the first-person experience of consciousness. For example, David E. Klemm writes in response to Loyal Rue:

I contend that the first-person experience of consciousness is in principle irreducible to natural facts and is not a possible object of scientific investigation. Even if the materialistic program could be successfully applied to such conscious activities as thinking and perceiving, reducing them to neuronal mechanisms, the felt experiences (qualia) of thinking and perceiving would be left unexplained. The reason is that immediate self-consciousness necessarily eludes scientific analysis because it is not a sensibly observable object, even in the form of a neural

* Here is another appropriation of the romantics, and especially Schelling: the organic model of natural processes was the principle on the basis of which the romantics, led by Schelling, broke with the mechanical determinism of their predecessors.
process, but an “inner life” that accompanies these other activities of consciousness.¹

This is quite true. However, the Tillichian ontology in which our analysis is grounded is not a mechanistic materialism, which cannot scientifically investigate the first-person experience of consciousness. Rather, our ontology sees science itself as a product of the separation of “mind and matter,” subject and object. Thus, in principle, as Klemm says, science is incapable of studying consciousness because consciousness is essentially subjective, and it is always the subject doing the observation. We will return to this later. The point here is simply that our ontology roots both subject and object in a primordial unity—subject and object are modes of the appearance of being and ultimately are inseparable, in that each constitutes the other. Consequently, consciousness is not something that must be explained as anything other than a product of natural processes, yet it cannot be reduced to “nature” if nature is understood mechanistically rather than organically. That is, consciousness can be the result of organic evolution—in that the organism that is conscious is a product of evolution—and irreducible to the firing of neurons—in that the firing of neurons is observable, objective phenomenon that is not identical to subjectivity in principle.

On the other hand, causal closure may be rejected on the basis that it cannot explain the chain of causes itself. That is, if all explanation is causal, and the chain of causes is restricted to observable, natural phenomena, then causal closure cannot explain the existence of the chain itself. As, of course, it cannot. Causal closure is only operative from within the realm of the finite. We cannot look for the cause of the cosmos or the world from within that chain at all—this would make the cosmos an element in the cause-effect chain, while the cosmos simply is the finite totality of that chain. Thus,
causal closure is in error when it seeks to replace a chain of causes for the ground of being. Yet this is precisely the error of most forms of naturalism, as we will see.

Thus, it seems, our position shares some elements in common with the naturalist viewpoint on the surface, but our provisions create a wedge between the Tillichian ontology and conventional naturalism. We must then ask more pointedly: How is our understanding of Nature and the divine related to religious naturalism as it is commonly understood? Or, to put the question another way, does it make sense to say that this sort of theology is a variety of religious naturalism at all? But here we are running ahead of ourselves—for we have not yet decided what, precisely, religious naturalism means…

For this let us consult the excellent work by Jerome A. Stone on the subject. Religious naturalism, of course, is a variety of naturalism—but what is naturalism? Naturalism, according to Stone, is “a set of beliefs and attitudes that focuses on this world. On the negative side it involves the assertion that there seems to be no ontologically distinct and superior reality (such as God, soul, or heaven) to ground, explain, or give meaning to the world.” Thus we already find a departure of religious naturalism from Tillichian theology. Tillich, of course, affirms the ground of being. Yet the ontological distinction is not as simple as it may seem. Tillich does not affirm a supernatural realm in his affirmation of the ground of being, and the ontological distinction between the ground of being and finite appearances of being is shot through with subtlety, as we have seen. “On the positive side,” Stone continues, naturalism “affirms that attention should be focused on the events and processes of this world to provide what degree of explanation and meaning are possible to this life.” Again, this is
not far from Tillich—in *The Courage to Be* he clearly affirms being in the world and rejects appeals to another life for the provision of meaning.

This, then, brings us to religious naturalism as such. Stone explains that religious naturalism “is the type of naturalism which affirms a set of beliefs and attitudes that there are religious aspects of this world which can be appreciated within a naturalistic framework. There are some events or processes in our experience that elicit responses that can appropriately be called religious.” Yet again, Tillich’s language of the mystical approach to nature clearly reflects this attitude. So, given the above provisions, it seems that a Tillichian theology *might* be naturalistic in the relevant sense. But how? It is not pantheism, as we saw, and certainly not a form of Goddess worship—the invocation of Gaia as a guiding symbol does not necessitate *that*.

Tillich’s understanding of nature is not, however, a strict naturalism, though it may share some affinities, especially in that both reject the explanatory power of supernaturalism and see nature as expressive of sacred power. Rather, Stone calls Tillich’s theology a “revised theism.” Revised theism, Stone says, repudiates supernaturalism—as distinguished from classical theism, as we have seen—but is not naturalism in the relevant sense. For a revised theist, “there is ‘a dimension,’ which we humans can call God, that is in some sense not reducible to the world.” Clearly, Tillich falls into this category rather than a strict naturalism, and Stone says so explicitly: “Paul Tillich’s claim that God is the ground of being, not the supreme being, may be taken as typical. Tillich is not a naturalist in the [strict] sense that we are using the term.”

To bring out this distinction, let us turn now to a paradigmatic example of strict naturalism as it looks at the religious: Loyal Rue’s *Religion is Not About God*. This work
shares a basic attitude with other naturalistic treatments of—and attempts to “explain away”—religion, such as Pascal Boyer’s Religion Explained and Daniel C. Dennett’s Breaking the Spell (which is really just a repackaging of Boyer’s theory for public consumption, with a healthy dose of vitriol thrown in for flavor). Rue’s book goes beyond these, however, by ending with a statement of religious naturalism as such, which makes his work such a useful example to compare and contrast with Tillich’s revised theism.

The Limitation of Ungrounded Religious Naturalism

From the beginning, Loyal Rue proposes a “general and naturalistic theory of religion.” Thus Rue is an interesting example in that he explicitly invokes the idea of the naturalness of phenomena as a primary explanatory criterion. First, he seeks to explain religion—not God or Nature or Gaia, but the existence and power of religion as such—and to explain it through a general theory: “By a general theory,” he explains “I mean one that tells us what religion is, where it comes from, and how it functions.” Second, his theory is explicitly naturalistic: “By a naturalistic theory I mean one that reduces religious experiences and expressions to the status of natural events having natural causes.” Toward that end, Rue adopts what he terms “consilient scientific materialism.”

This approach holds, first, that “whatever is or happens in nature is contingent on a substrate of material reality.” Here we need not disagree—again, given the provision that “material reality” is not understood on the basis of the outmoded, seventeenth-century mechanistic ontology, Rue simply denies supernatural explanations. Rue,
moreover, seems to avoid a naive mechanistic ontology where he allows for four “general
categories” of “material organization”: “physical, biological, psychological, and
cultural.”\textsuperscript{11} That is, it is not so much Rue’s \textit{materialism} that is problematic but that he
links it to \textit{scientism}. His consilient scientific materialism does not simply note that all
natural phenomena—which really means all phenomena at all, once supernaturalism is
ontologically ruled out—is contingent on a substrate of material reality. This is not
terribly controversial. More than that, he holds that the disciplines of the natural sciences
taken together present a “normative” and “coherent, unified meshwork of ideas that
renders intelligible the full scope of human experience.”\textsuperscript{12}

Of course there is a distinction between intelligible and fully explained—a
distinction scientism seems to gloss over—but Rue himself tends to write as though once
an experience is intelligible in terms of its material substrate, according to a naturalistic
interpretation, it is explained with no remainder. Hence his avowal of reductionism. For
it is one thing to affirm that any human activity is natural—we are a part of Nature even
as we are apart from it, as our analysis has shown, and in the broad sense \textit{everything we
do} is natural. It is quite another thing to claim that the interpretation of reality is
exhausted by appeal to materialistic naturalism. It is worth noting that Rue denies that
his theory falls prey to scientism—“a set of philosophical beliefs about science, not a set
of tested beliefs about nature”—and that he holds that science as such “presents no
obstacles to theistic belief.”\textsuperscript{13} Yet he does strongly imply that the natural sciences
provide a mechanism “for giving us an ultimate explanation for all natural facts.”\textsuperscript{14} And
since the “full scope of human experience” is, in a broad sense, natural, scientific
explanation would therefore render it ultimately “intelligible.”\textsuperscript{15}
As Langdon Gilkey has made clear, however, modern science represents an abstraction from the full scope of human experience—specifically, in Tillichian terms, from the awareness of unity with being and Nature that is the condition of our existential awareness of separation. That is, modern science takes the separation as fundamental, makes the subject-object split absolute, and thus can view only objects. “Most people,” however, “including most scientists, take these descriptions as realistic, as describing what is there objectively, what nature really is.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet a critical view understands the determinations of modern science as interpretations of reality, products of the hermeneutical act of the subject viewing objects:

To the so-called new philosophy of science . . . these special sciences represent an ascending series of abstractions, accurate [or, in Heidegger’s terms, “correct”], provisionally valid, and trustworthy but themselves in part constructs of mind and so representing relative perspectives. They are abstractions from the scientists, the inquiring subject, and so abstractions from the whole realm of consciousness . . . Inevitably, in inquiry “reality” is sundered into objects over and against and studied by subjects.\textsuperscript{17}

It is precisely the pre-sundered reality that science, in principle, cannot grasp, as science depends for its very method—the method that provides such useful and powerful correct understandings—on the split between subject and object. When it makes that split absolute, however, is reduces reality from primordial unity to ultimate separation, and replaces truth with correctness. The instrument cannot examine itself—in so doing it turns the subject into object and thus can never grasp the subject at all. This is what Professor Klemm means when he writes that “immediate self-consciousness necessarily eludes scientific analysis because it is not a sensibly observable object, even in the form of a neural process.”\textsuperscript{18} In this, naturalism reveals its tendency to forget that science represents, in Gilkey’s words, “a relative perspective, a hermeneutical inquiry by means
of symbols and models into a mystery,” a mystery that the method, in principle, cannot grasp.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet it is precisely the hermeneutic character of all inquiry into reality that we must not forget. This point is particularly well-made by Paul Ricoeur in his essay “Existence and Hermeneutics.” “Before objectivity, there is the horizon of the world,” he writes, drawing on Heidegger, “before the subject of the theory of knowledge, there is operative life . . . the subject which has objects is derived from this operative life.”\textsuperscript{20} He continues:

Understanding is no longer the response of the human sciences to the naturalistic explanation; it involves a manner of being akin to being, prior to the encounter with particular beings. At the same time, life’s ability to freely stand at a distance in respect to itself, to transcend itself, becomes a structure of finite being. If the historian can measure himself against the thing itself, if he can compare himself to the known, it is because both he and his object are historical. Making this historical character explicit is thus prior to any methodology.\textsuperscript{21}

In this we clearly hear echoes of Heidegger on science and technology: the modern sciences, epitomized by physics, are the product of the human interpretive act of making explicit the challenging that is its dominant mode of being in the modern world it occupies. Though Ricoeur cites history, we can also paraphrase him here in terms of science and naturalism: If the scientist and naturalist can measure himself against the thing itself, if he can compare himself to the known, it is because both he and his object are to science objects, and to naturalism natural. And this is correct: to the sciences the human being can become an object—though it is never only object—and the human being \textit{is} natural, though Nature herself is a product of the human estrangement from its ground.
The problem of scientism and naturalism, then, is not that natural science does not correctly determine the object of its study, even if that object includes human experience, even if its object is the religious impulse toward God, the ground of being. It is that it seeks to render intelligible the full scope of human experience, which it never in principle can do. That is, while science may correctly determine its object, when it comes to the human being, the determination of science is in principle always only a partial interpretation of one mode of human being. This error is so fundamental it is rarely noticed by those guilty of it. According to Ricoeur, “There is nothing surprising in this: interpretation begins with the multiple determination of symbols—with their over-determination, as one says in psychoanalysis; but each interpretation, by definition, reduces this richness, this multivocity, and ‘translates’ the symbol according to its own frame of reference.” Thus any interpretation “can find only what it seeks.” An ontology and theology that seeks to hold interpretations in conflict and harmony can then look to the principle of the unity of interpretation, the depth dimension according to which all interpretations are modes of the appearance of being. Rather than either divinizing or disparaging science, we must recognize the natural sciences as one hermeneutical approach to reality and hold it in tension with others if we hope to uncover the truth behind its correctness.

When, in the end, Rue affirms a pantheistic naturalism, he is neglecting this depth dimension for causal explanations only applicable to the realm of finitude. “God is naturalized and Nature is divinized,” he writes, “the problem of the missing metaphor begins to fade away and the central core of religious naturalism becomes clear: Nature is the sacred object of humanity’s ultimate concern.” Nature is the ultimate ground of
natural facts.” Nature is the ground of natural facts—but this is simply a tautology:

Nature is the ground of natural facts—but this is simply a tautology:

Natural phenomena are, in the end, natural. Without understanding what “nature” means, he falls prey to the same error as the early Greek medical writers who first invoked the concept—he affirms the naturalness of all phenomena but neglects the existential meaning of Nature as an interpretive product of separation.

Hence Rue misunderstands the Tillichian idea of ultimate concern, though he cites it in avoidance of Tillich’s revised theism. Tillich writes, “The ultimate mystery appears when reason is driven beyond itself to the ‘ground and abyss,’ to that which ‘precedes’ reason,” to the original mystery “that there is something and not nothing. . . . The mystery that is revealed is of ultimate concern to us because it is the ground of our being.”

This is precisely what we cannot answer from within the viewpoint of limited naturalism. And again, “In terms like ‘ultimate,’ ‘unconditional,’ ‘infinite,’ ‘absolute,’ the difference between subject and object is overcome.” The very concept of Nature depends upon the existential separation of self and world, subject and object—it cannot, in Tillich’s terms, be the sacred object of humanity’s ultimate concern because it depends upon estrangement from the absolute, primordial unity for its very intelligibility. Nature is an expression of the divine creativity, but as a product of estrangement it remains finite. Of course it could be argued that what Rue here means by nature is the all-encompassing totality of all natural phenomena, and this is quite true. Yet that totality can never be its own ground precisely because it remains finite, contingent. It is the eternal totality of the cause-effect chain which is grounded in the depth dimension of primordial unity. Even as totality it is the expression of the power of being, the divine ground.
**Nature as a Religious Idea**

Though Tillich may not be a naturalist in the strict sense, he is certainly deeply concerned with nature—with the non-human wild as it appears as an expression of divine creativity. In this, Nature becomes a religious idea, and when we ask theologically the question of nature we ask after the relations among the human, the divine, and the non-human world of which humans are, still, a part. We answered that question in terms of complexified dual participation, according to which God participates in the human and in the natural world, humans participate in nature and in the divine life, and nature participates in the life of the human species and the individual as well as in the divine life. In this religious understanding, nature can be an object of ethical concern just as all life is, whether it is human or not. Yet this is certainly not the only possible religious understanding of nature, and the view of nature one takes—more likely to be unconscious than considered—can lead one to see nature as something to be dominated, controlled, and ethically disregarded where it is not a matter of immediate human concern, or as an object of care and concern for its own sake, and as that to which we most immediately belong.

In the previous chapter we considered Nature as a concept. As a religious term, however, our approach to nature involves symbols. In the next chapter we will begin to develop one important symbol to guide our approach, that of Gaia. Here, though, let us turn briefly to some other common symbols of nature. Alister McGrath, in his *Scientific Theology*, provides a useful list, including the following: (1) nature as theater; (2) nature as book; (3) nature as mirror; (4) nature as female; (5) nature as mechanism; (6) nature as
creation. The first three are relatively simple, and bear only tangentially on our concerns here. The latter three are more important.

In the first symbolic understanding, the natural world “is a theatre in which God displays power and wisdom for the edification of its human audience” and “the arena in which Christians pursue the ultimate goal of eternal salvation.” Here a Tillichian may surely agree—the power of being certainly is displayed in and through natural phenomena insofar as they are the expression of divine creativity—with the caveat that they express the power of being in and of themselves and exist for themselves in the ethically relevant sense. It is not the case, as our analysis has shown, that natural phenomena have value only insofar as human beings recognize the divine working through them. In the second symbolic understanding, nature is seen as a book, “meant to be read . . . alongside scripture as two distinct, yet related, sources of knowledge about God.” Here again Tillich would agree—for the purposes of our analysis we would need to consider the degree to which and the way in which scripture can function as a source of knowledge about God; our concern, however, remains with the concept and religious import of Nature. In the third symbolic understanding, nature is symbolized as a mirror, referring to “the impact which nature has upon peoples’ perceptions of themselves.” Since self and world are so tied together it only makes sense that as we see the world, so is our self-understanding shaped. Indeed, this is a central theme of Heidegger, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Each of these three is interesting and informs our already ambivalent and complex understanding of Nature, but in the end they fall short—they symbolize only aspects of the phenomenon, and that quite incompletely. Nature does display divine power, but it is
not simply a stage that we can occupy at one point in time and not at another—we are always already a part of it, and while we set ourselves apart from it and make it the backdrop of our drama this only brings home all the more forcefully the estrangement this expresses. Nature can be a source of knowledge but as with any book it must be interpreted, and our hermeneutical schema determine that interpretation far more than the text itself. Our understanding of Nature does reflect our own self-understanding back to us, but so too does our understanding of ourselves determine how we view nature.

The fourth symbolic approach to nature McGrath lists is “nature as female.” On the surface—and, truly, in real depth—this symbolization carries some significant markers of terrifically positive valuation. Nature in this symbolization is the nurturing mother, the womb, the protector, the source of all life. Here the symbol of Gaia begins. But it carries, too, a dark side. It is not simply that nature can be a dangerous mother; her dangerousness is a marker of her power. Rather—and this becomes especially pronounced with the challenging setting-upon characteristic of scientific technology—nature “is too often portrayed as a passive, compliant and exploitable woman.”

This is a central critique of ecofeminism, which argues that the domination of women and of nature is fundamentally connected. As the cultural anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner wrote as early as 1972, “Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not to say oppress, her.” And certainly the earliest modern scientific writers had a tendency to make this connection explicit. An oft quoted example comes from the work of the pioneer of the scientific method, Francis Bacon, \textit{The Masculine Birth of Time, or, The Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man Over the Universe}. In
this text, Bacon writes, “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her
children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.” This is a tendency it will
be necessary to avoid in our discussions of Gaia to follow—though in this case an
awareness of the problem may be enough to correct for it, and in any case it is our intent
to elevate the religious status of Nature. We would be foolish to intentionally denigrate
it. As such, when we symbolize Nature as with the feminine symbol, Gaia, we will
intentionally retain the sense of mother, protector, and dangerous power, and we will seek
to counteract the sense of pliant, dominated victim.

The fifth symbol McGrath discusses—nature as mechanism—we considered at
some length in Chapter V under the heading of “Nature and Science.” In this
symbolization, nature is seen as entirely separated from the human observer and as “inert,
reliable, and ordered” such that it “could be controlled and regulated.” Of course, as we
saw above, this new way of understanding nature “swept away earlier attempts to
conceive nature as endowed with human qualities—such as ‘wisdom’ or ‘harmony.’”

The mechanism that is inert can be mastered and manipulated from without, free of moral
concerns beyond immediate effects on human beings. As such, this symbolization goes
hand in hand with the fourth, and will be avoided even more assiduously, for while a
morally aware view of nature symbolized as female can affirm the status of Nature as an
ethical subject, there is no moral awareness that can make a machine the subject of moral
concern except that it be the property of a Man.

Finally, the sixth symbolic approach McGrath considers is nature as creation. For
the Greeks, McGrath reminds us, nature was an organism that included everything,
humans and gods; on the Christian view he espouses, nature is made by God but is not
God. This, of course, is in response to a limited religious naturalism as discussed in the previous section. God is wholly other: “creation is ontologically distinct from God.” As with the first three symbolizations, a Tillichian theology must affirm this—Tillich himself writes of creation. Again, though, we must insert two brief caveats. First, the idea that nature is “made” by God must be understood along the lines of the ontological doctrine of the self-manifestation of being itself and the symbolic account of the divine life to avoid over-literal picture-thinking. Second, along the same track, the ontological distinctiveness of God must always be understood in terms of Tillich’s panentheism, not on the basis of classical theism’s supernaturalism.

In the end, each of these symbols of nature is revealing, and each speaks to the culturally mediated character of the concept. In each case, the way in which we understand nature—and the way that we understand the material of its symbol, especially in the nature-as-female account—will determine the religious importance we give to the natural world. Where it is a stage, it is useful only insofar as we are playing out the drama of salvation before it. Where it is a machine, it has no ethical standing at all save as property. Where it is the nurturing and dangerous mother, it is that from which we are born; yet even this is tempered by a patriarchal misogyny that sees the feminine as that which must be dominated precisely because it can be dangerous to male comfort and authority.

In Part Three we will turn to the symbol of the Earth Mother and reclaim it in terms of a scientific understanding that seeks to leave seventeenth century mechanism and misogyny behind. We will consider the ways in which the symbol of Gaia, understood in terms of the Gaia theory of James Lovelock, can give content to the
assertion with which we ended Part One—that nature, too, is in the image of God. Before that, however, we must finish our existential and religious discussion of Nature as a product of estrangement. Toward that end we will first look at Tillich’s doctrine of estrangement to unpack its religious import more fully. Second, we will consider the idea that Tillich adapts from Hegel—that estranged consciousness constitutes the process of divine self-awareness.

**The Religious Import of Estrangement**

We dealt broadly with estrangement as a *condition* of existence in Part One—let us now look more specifically at estrangement as it *manifests* itself in human existence, according to Tillich. We will recall that for Tillich the state of existence simply *is* the state of estrangement, and that estrangement operates on at least four levels. “Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself.”

Further, we have also seen that human beings are estranged from the natural world, for the natural world is an expression of divine creativity, “the glory of which sounds through the glory of nature.”

Tillich notes that Hegel introduced the idea of estrangement or alienation, describing “life processes as possessing an original unity which is disrupted by the split into subjectivity and objectivity.” Above our analysis showed that this split is the basis of the concept of Nature—the concept is one possible product of the separation of self and world, subject and object, whereby we interpret the world that we, as selves, are simultaneously part of and apart from as the non-human, non-divine wild—thus the concept of Nature is a product of estrangement. This concept is, further, central to post-
Hegelian, even anti-Hegelian, existentialism. The existentialist philosophers, Tillich reports, “rejected Hegel’s contention that estrangement is overcome by reconciliation in history.” Instead, they claimed, “estrangement points to the basic characteristic of man’s predicament,” and the profundity of the term “lies in the implication that one belongs to that from which one is estranged.”39 By now we are well familiar with this—it is important, however, to recognize the degree to which existential philosophy is a response to Hegel, for we will see in the next section that in many important ways Tillich reinterprets Hegel’s doctrine of the trinity so as to render it acceptable to his own existentialist tendencies.

At this point, though, what is important is that Tillich correlates the philosophical concept of estrangement with the religious symbol of sin, and suggests that sin conveys meanings that estrangement does not. “Sin,” he explains “expresses what is not implied in the term ‘estrangement,’”—but which is of central importance to Tillich’s understanding—“namely, the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs.”40 That is, in the existential, ontological description estrangement simply is the condition of existence, while the religious understanding brings out the personal import that estranged is not simply what we are, estrangement is something we do. “Man’s predicament is estrangement, but his estrangement is sin. It is not a state of things, like the laws of nature, but a matter of both personal freedom and universal destiny,” as Tillich puts it. “It is not the disobedience to a law that makes an act sinful, but the fact that it is an expression of man’s estrangement from God, from men, from himself.”41 Thus it is important here to point out that our destructive tendencies toward the natural world—our propensities for challengingly setting upon nature—are expressions of our
estrangement from nature, whereby we turn against that to which we belong, against both the proximal and ultimate sources of our being.

Now, according to Tillich estrangement has three “marks”: “unbelief,” “hubris,” and “concupiscence.”

Perhaps better than the term “unbelief,” Tillich suggests, would be “unfaith.” For belief is simply a cognitive assent to a particular proposition, whether spoken or assumed, while unbelief, like faith, is “an act of the total personality.” Of course for Tillich “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned.” It is “an act of the personality as a whole.” And, most importantly, “One is ultimately concerned only about something to which one essentially belongs and from which one is existentially separated. . . . The concern of faith is identical with the desire of love: reunion with that to which one belongs and from which one is separated.” Thus unbelief turns away from the ultimate union of self and world, subject and object, Man and Nature, I and thou, and toward either side of the separation. In the challenging setting-upon we turn toward the object and make even ourselves objects, but we do so in the service of the more original turn toward the subject as the ultimate. Thus Bacon’s hubristic challenge—“I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave”—is characteristic of both the turn outward and the turn inward, for both are aspects of the turn away.

Let us then turn to the idea of hubris as Tillich relates it to estrangement, for this is most productive. “In estrangement, man is outside the divine center to which his own center essentially belongs,” Tillich writes. “He is the center of himself and of his world.” Yet human beings are so utterly finite, for all the infinity of their imagination
and ambition. To make one’s finite self, apart from one’s infinite ground, the ultimate ground of meaning and center of value is the epitome of hubris: “It is sin in its total form,” according to which human beings make idols of their own creations.\textsuperscript{47} Thus what Heidegger calls the transformation of the natural world into standing reserve is an ultimate act of hubris. In estrangement we turn away not only from the ultimate ground of our being but also from the immediate, proximal ground of our life, our organic being, turning away from that to which we belong and thus separating the human world from the natural world. And thus in our challenging hubris we make nature dead, mechanical, a commodity. In so doing we deny that the natural world is an expression of divine creativity, like us created in the image of God and like us deserving of ethical consideration, and make all nature into only products, the value of which are only their value for us … a very specific, limited value for a very specific, limited human purpose, commoditization, itself only a means to further means. Thus can we sin against nature.

Finally, Tillich points to concupiscence as the last marker of estrangement. The reason we are tempted to make ourselves the center of all meaning and value is because it places us in the position of drawing the whole world into ourselves, making it our own and mastering it, thereby believing we have overcome our finitude. We elevate ourselves beyond particularity and make ourselves universal on the basis of our particularity, Tillich writes.

This is the temptation of man in his position between finitude and infinity. Every individual, since he is separated from the whole, desires reunion with the whole. His “poverty” makes him seek for abundance. This is the root of love in all its forms. The possibility of reaching unlimited abundance is the temptation of man who is a self and has a world. The classical name for this desire is \textit{concupiscentia}—“concupiscence”—the unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one’s self.\textsuperscript{48}
Hence the desire for reunion, which is love, forgets that all is united in the divine ground and seeks to draw all things into itself. The religious import of estrangement as it applies to the question of Nature lies in this, that in our unbelieving turning-away toward ourselves we seek to make ourselves the center of all meaning and value, and we seek to master nature. But she cannot be mastered, only challenged and set upon. We do not simply seek to be whole, apart from the ground of our being—we seek to transform it from ground to product, and thus we seek to destroy the most proximal source of our very being. This is not only idolatrous blasphemy, it is a bizarre and distinctly Western impulse to suicide, which may yet succeed.

**Dialectic and Consciousness**

We have seen that faith is identical with the root of love: the desire for the reunion of that which is separated. We already knew that separation is the condition of existence. Estrangement finds its ultimate expression in hubris and concupiscence, but it also finds its ultimate desire in the experiential realization of a recovery of the primordial union beyond separation… this, for Tillich, is the root of the religious impulse. In the quest for wholeness, human beings do not simply look to the divine ground as the prfus of creation but for union with the flow of the divine life in which we are rooted, of which we are finite expressions, but as such from which we are existentially separated. Finally, as the proximal source of our being is the natural world—which is itself an expression of the divine creativity that is infinitely more primal, more originary, and more encompassing than ours—a complete awareness of union will involve the awareness of that proximal source as a mediating source itself rooted in the unconditional ground of being. That is,
the religious impulse desires the reunion of all from which the human is estranged—the
ground of being, other beings, one’s own being, and the natural world. And, as the
natural world encompasses and grounds other beings as well as one’s own beings,
resolving that union is ingredient in the ultimate desire of faith.

Nature, Trinity, and Divine Life in Hegel and Tillich

The above is a result of our analysis of Tillich’s ontological theology, but, as we
have seen, the very concept of estrangement derives from G.W. F. Hegel. Moreover, the
idea of dialectic that dominated Part One was deeply Hegelian, as is Tillich’s dialectical
understanding of the divine life. We have briefly discussed Tillich’s doctrine of the
trinity and we will here show that it takes up some key elements of Hegel’s dialectic as
well. And Hegel’s understanding of the place of Nature seems amenable to our analysis
of Tillich, as well. “God reveals Himself in two different ways: as Nature and as
Spirit,” Hegel writes in his “Philosophy of Nature.” He continues: “Nature is the son of
God, but not as the Son, but as abiding in otherness—the divine Idea as held fast for a
moment outside the divine love. Nature is Spirit estranged from itself; in Nature, Spirit
lets itself go, a Bacchic god unrestrained and unmindful of itself; in Nature, the unity of
the Notion is concealed.” Here Hegel comes quite close to our concept of Nature—
Nature is for him an expression of divine creativity and a product of the self-separation of
the divine that makes creation possible, or, better, that is creation as such.

Thus, let us turn to considering the doctrine of the trinity as expressed by both
Tillich and Hegel. We discussed Tillich’s doctrine of the trinity as symbolizing the
dialectical, dynamic process of the divine life at some length in Chapter II, under two
headings: “The Ontological Structure of Life” and “The Divine Life.” There we showed that Tillich separates out “moments within the divine life” that can be read as analogous to the elements of all life as life: self-identity (or the Godhead), self-alteration (or *logos*), and return (or Spirit). These moments, which frame Tillich’s understanding of the symbol of the Trinity, Tillich calls the abyss, the *logos*, and the Spirit. Hegel speaks of the trinity in very similar, dialectical terms, and names them Universality (or the Idea or Notion), Particularity (or Nature) and singularity (or Spirit). 51

According to Tillich, in the Spirit God “goes out from” God’s self—the Spirit “proceeds from the divine ground,” manifests itself in creation, and lives as that which is both separated and unified. 52 Again, this language is very similar to Hegel’s, accordint to which the Absolute Universality self-manifests in three moments:

(1) First, in and for itself, God in his eternity before the creation of the world and outside the world.
(2) Second, God creates the world and posits the separation. . . . What is thus created is at first an other, posited outside of God. But God is essentially the reconciling to himself of what is alien, what is particular, what is posited in separation from him. . . .
(3) In the third place . . . Spirit has reconciled with itself what it distinguished from itself in its act of disremption, of primal division, and thus it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit in its community. 53

Here it is important to note that in Tillich’s system, speaking of a God *before* the world is invalid in any literal, temporal sense—only insofar as being-itself is the ground of being, manifesting as the power of being, can God be said to be before the world. Nor does Hegel make the literalistic mistake. As S. Alexander noted as early as 1866:

The belief in special acts of creation which evolution has driven from the field would not have delayed Hegel long. Such a belief implies the merely mechanical conception of a God existing outside a world which also exists as an eternal uncreated. But nature is not external to the idea, but involved in it. If then it is taken as a whole, it is not created by a definite act before which it did not exist, for it shares the eternity of the idea and is timeless. Regarded as the process in
time by which nature maintains its character, it is for ever created, or is a perpetual creation.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus Tillich’s description of the divine life—according to which “God’s life is life as spirit, and the Trinitarian principles are moments within the process of the divine life”\textsuperscript{55}—is clearly a re-working of Hegel’s Trinitarian dialectic. For Tillich, as for Hegel, creation is the symbol of God’s outpouring into separation and return in the union of that which was separated in creation. Further, in his doctrine of the trinity, so reminiscent of Hegel’s (though in important respects distinct, as we shall see), Tillich brings together the structure and functions of organic life with the process of the self manifestation of being-itself.

\textit{Consciousness as Divine Self-Awareness}

It is neither the point here to engage in an extended discussion of Hegel’s philosophy—this is a dissertation on Tillich, after all—nor to engage in a philosophical inquiry into the nature of consciousness as such. Rather, it is important to discuss consciousness as it is belongs to the context of Tillich’s system and Hegel’s philosophy of religion. Thus, a few introductory points shall suffice.

In Tillich’s ontology, consciousness is possible on the basis of the separation of subject and object, which is itself possible on the basis of the separation of self and world, and which is itself again possible on the basis of the self-separation of being-itself—the ultimate condition of the possibility of the appearance of being as such. Thus consciousness is a product of the primordial unity of being-itself and its self-separation. Hence consciousness is inherently involved in estrangement as the condition of existence.
Truth, then, is the partial and provisional reunion of subject and object in awareness (here Tillich borrows heavily from Heidegger, as we saw in Chapter V):

Therefore, one can say that the cognitive act is born out of the desire to bridge the gap between subject and object. The equivocal term for the result of such a union is “truth.” The word is claimed by both science and religion and even sometimes by the arts. If one of these claims is accepted exclusively, new words for the other claims must be found—which, it seems to me, is unnecessary because the basic phenomenon is the same in all cases: the fragmentary reunion of the knowing subject with the known object in the act of knowledge.  

The word “fragmentary” here is important. But more to the point, it is essential to note that since the yearning for the experiential realization of a recovery of the primordial union beyond separation is the root of the religious impulse—the desire of faith and love—then the cognitive, conscious phenomenon of the awareness of truth, however fragmentary, is a fulfillment of this desire.

And indeed for both Tillich and Hegel the conscious awareness of the essential unity of self and world, subject and object, universal and particular, seems to be the coming to self-awareness of God. For, as Tillich writes, “Through the separation within himself God loves himself.”  

If this is so—and if this is so because being-itself manifests itself in and through the finite products of that separation—and if by coming to the awareness that truth is the essential unity of subject and object in the divine ground one comes to the awareness that one is essentially one with one’s divine source—then the human being reaching this awareness reveals the process by which God is becoming self-aware. For all reunion is the desire and the result of love, and through the separation within himself God loves himself.

Thus, as the fully centered, fully self-related being, the human being is the most aware of the existential condition of separation but also the most fully actualized site for
the possibility of the experienced self-awareness of God. Moreover, the divine self-awareness is progressive; this is evident on two levels. First, because our own awareness changes, grows—even the content of our religious awareness does not end with the cognitive acceptance of the existential, ontological truth about truth, but sparks ever increasing levels of understanding of the import of that truth, leading to the possibility of ecstasy. Second, because no human understanding is purely and simply individual—it always builds upon and finds place within the horizon of collective human understanding.

Hence the word “fragmentary,” highlighted above, takes on its importance, for human understanding is always and forever fragmentary. It is on precisely this point that Tillich separates himself from Hegel: “He took non-being into the very center of his thought . . . he created concepts like “estrangement” . . . But he kept all these existential elements from undermining the essentialist structure of his thought. Non-being has been conquered in the totality of his system.”58 For Tillich, on the other hand, nonbeing has not been conquered, it is infinitely being overcome. Hegel, Tillich writes, believed that estrangement had been overcome as a result of his totalizing system, while for existentialists (of whom Tillich is one on this point), “Reconciliation is a matter of anticipation and expectation, but not of reality.”59 Where reunion with the ground of being does take place it never fully conquers nonbeing, reunion is always fragmentary—even in the courage to be one takes the threat of nonbeing into one’s affirmation of being.

Therefore, in Tillich’s method of correlation we find not a complete, universalized, static system but a process of growing, unfolding awareness. In Robert P. Scharlemann’s terms, Tillich’s systematizing as such is a process of the “correlative relation of reflection and response,”60 according to which philosophical reflections
question being in terms of concepts, religious response answers from the depth of being in terms of symbols, and each corrects for the totalizing tendency of the other.

The two terms [the ultimate, or being-itself, and God] and activities [reflection and response] support each other, each one providing an answer to a question about the other. In actual reflection and actual response, however, we are not dealing with questions about the two but with questions of the two—that is, with questions that arise from each. Each of them has a limiting point which, when it is reached, shifts the activity into its correlative opposite. Our effort to grasp being-itself by reflection results in a perpetual question. We can never positively grasp it. Similarly, when we try to respond to God, we perpetually discover that there is no objective reality which embodies him.61

Because the ultimate questions of ontology and theology are correlates, and because each shifts back and forth from one to the other at the boundary line expressed in the formulation “God is being-itself,” Tillich’s system is open. Thus, the coming-to-self-awareness of God is never complete, never total. It is an eternal unfolding, as is the divine life itself.

Yet the human individual is not simply aware of his or her union with the divine ground in simple recognition of the truth about truth—rather, that recognition, when cultivated, can give way to ecstasy:

The question of the relation between Spirit and spirit is usually answered by the metaphorical statement that the divine Spirit dwells and works in the human spirit. In this context, the word “in” implies all the problems of the relation of the divine to the human, of the unconditional to the conditioned, and of the creative ground to creaturely existence. If the divine Spirit breaks into the human spirit, this does not mean that it rests there, but that it drives the human spirit out of itself. The “in” of the divine Spirit is an “out” for the human spirit. The spirit, a dimension of finite life, is driven into successful self-transcendence; it is grasped by something ultimate and unconditional. It is still the human spirit; it remains what it is, but at the same time, it goes out of itself under the impact of the divine Spirit. “Ecstasy” is the classical term for this state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence.63

The human is taken out of itself, into unity—but awareness as consciousness depends upon the self as separate. Hence, the individual is never fully aware of unity. Even
mystical moments of oneness with the divine are just that, momentary, and as long as they last awareness is not.

Finite being never escapes estrangement—this is the meaning of Tillich’s existentialist claim that reconciliation is always a matter of anticipation. But consciousness as a part of and development of the natural world is only insofar as it belongs to its proximal ground. This paradox is a product of the basic structure of estrangement—that we are apart from that which we are always already a part of—and recognition of this is another form of the acceptance of belonging to the ground of being as an individual in spite of the reality of our finitude that Tillich calls the courage to be: “Being-itself transcends every being infinitely; God in the divine-human encounter transcends man unconditionally.” (We could also say that the natural world transcends the human being perpetually…) “Faith bridges this infinite gap by accepting the fact that in spite of it the power of being is present, that he who is separated is accepted.” The faith that confronts and accepts the paradox of belonging to that from which we are estranged—God as the ultimate ground of our being, and the natural world as the proximal ground—is the courage to be, and it involves the self-aware participation of the individual in an ongoing process of coming-to-being.

Being-itself manifests itself in, to, and through creation—whether that be the cosmos, the natural wild, the growth of the human race or the human individual. Nature as such is a product of existential estrangement—but this estrangement is only one moment in the divine life. In the moment of return, expressed in existence as the courage to be, the primordial unity that the religious impulse drives toward is affirmed even in the midst of estrangement. The natural world, to which we belong and from which we are
estranged, thus is necessarily created in the image of God, for it is the proximal ground of our being, though as conditioned it is not the ultimate ground—and it is an expression of divine creativity just as we are. It, like us, actualizes potential in the process of life and does so to a degree far more encompassing than do we.

One of the potentialities actualized by the natural world is the potentiality for life to give rise to consciousness—this potentiality is actualized to its fullest degree in us. Yet the collective consciousness of the species—all that we have learned, and the evolutionary precursors to the capacity to learn and intellectualize prior to that—this, too, is analogous to the divine. For if we can say that God himself lives through the separation within himself, then we must say that in the human consciousness of nature, nature knows herself. In us and in our consciousness of our belonging to nature, nature herself is centered. Hence we now turn to our correlate symbol, Gaia, which expresses the awareness that the earth to which we belong, and which we understand in terms of the concept Nature, is itself a growing, organic process, centered in our consciousness and fully expressive of the structure and function of life.
Notes


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 9.

6. Ibid., 10.


8. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 14-15.

12. Ibid., 16.

13. Ibid., 316.


15. Ibid., 16.


17. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 13-14.


29. Ibid., 104.

30. Ibid., 106.


32. Francis Bacon, “The Masculine Birth of Time, or, The Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man Over the Universe.”


34. Ibid., 108.

35. Ibid., 145.


39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 2:46.

41. Ibid., 2:46-47.

42. Ibid., 2:47.


44. Ibid., 5.

45. Ibid., 130.

47. Ibid., 50-51.

48. Ibid., 52.


50. Ibid., 211.


52 Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:251.


56. Ibid., 3:54.

57. Ibid., 1:282.

58. Ibid., 2:24

59. Ibid., 2:25.

60. Robert P. Scharlemann, Reflection and Doubt, 187.

61. Ibid.


63. Ibid., 3:112.

PART THREE

THE SYMBOLIC NAME, GAIA
CHAPTER VII:
GAIA THEORY READ ONTOLOGICALLY

God is love. And, since God is being-itself, one must say that being-itself is love. This, however, is understandable only because the actuality of being is life. The process of the divine life has the character of love. According to the ontological polarity of individualization and participation, every life process unites a trend toward separation with a trend toward reunion. The unbroken unity of these two trends is the ontological nature of love. Its awareness as fulfillment of life is the emotional nature of love. Reunion presupposes separation. Love is absent where there is no individualization, and love can be realized only where there is full individualization, in man. But the individual also longs to return to the unity to which he belongs, in which he participates by his ontological nature. This longing for reunion is an element in every love, and its realization, however fragmentary, is experienced as bliss.

—Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume One

What is Gaia?

In Part One we grounded our study in Tillich’s theological ontology, considering both our guiding concept—being, and especially the constitutive dialectic of being and nonbeing—and our guiding symbol—the divine life, expressing the grounded dialectic as a creative process. In Part Two we employed that analysis to develop an ontological concept of Nature. This concept had two basic parts: first, Nature is that of which we are a part even while it is that from which we are apart; second, it is the proximal ground of our being, transcendent to us yet finite and transcended and grounded in the source of all being. Thus Nature can be said to be created in the image of God even as we are, for it is in and through Nature that God creates—or, conceptually rather than symbolically, it is in and through Nature that being-itself manifests itself—just as being-itself manifests in and through each and every individual human life. Moreover, since Nature transcends human being even as human being transcends Nature, each in their own way, the doctrine of dual participation was complexified by adding the third, mediating term.
In this final part, Part Three, we will correlate the concept of Nature as developed in Part Two with a symbol: Gaia. Hence, in this chapter we will begin by asking, “What is Gaia?” The question will be answered through an explanation of the Gaia theory of James Lovelock, which reveals the Earth to be a living thing, a “planet-sized entity.” We will then relate the scientific understanding of Gaia to the ontological concept of being as Tillich develops it, and also to his understanding of life. Finally, we will return to the idea of complex dual participation. (Though it may be better to say “triple participation,” this leaves out multiple dialectics of God-earth, God-human, Earth-human, God-human, et cetera; this can be multiplied to the point that “complex dual participation” speaks to both dialectic and the complexity of the inter-relations among the elements.) Through the lens of complex dual participation we will consider Lovelock’s claim that organisms and their environments co-evolve as elements in the planet-wide regulation of homeostasis characteristic of life. We will further return to a theme introduced in Part Two to consider the evolution of mind as the development of not only divine self-awareness but—as the venue of the manifestation of that awareness—the self-awareness of Gaia itself. We will then be in a position to develop an understanding of Gaia as a contemporary religious symbol in Chapter VIII, and in Chapter IX we will unpack some of the broader religious and moral implications of such a theological view.

**Gaia Theory Introduced**

In the Preface to the 2000 edition Lovelock repeatedly emphasizes that the name Gaia is metaphorical, that when he speaks of Gaia as an organism he does not intend to imply that Gaia is sentient. This is a charge that has often been leveled against the theory, and Lovelock’s clarifications to the contrary have not dispelled that: “The critics took their science earnestly,” writes Lovelock (himself a scientist of some note), “and to them the mere association with myth and storytelling made it bad science. My disclaimer was about as much use as is the health warning on a packet of cigarettes to a nicotine addict.”

In response he published an explanation of the theory in more scientific language, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth*, which spends no few pages presenting the evidence for the theory.

Of course, the idea of a Mother Goddess as the personification of the earth’s bounty is among the very oldest of religious symbols. Yet in the minds of many, such as the scientific critics of Lovelock’s theory, the name Gaia is inseparably mired in mythological thinking. By this late stage in this project we can surely affirm that any powerful religious symbol is correlated to a concept that expresses an existential concern. By unpacking Lovelock’s theory we will be able to see precisely what it is that we belong to when we say that, as much as we set ourselves apart from it, we are a part of Nature. It is this dependence and belonging that is expressed in the symbol—which we will consider in detail as a symbol in the next chapter—and thus to correlate the symbol of Gaia to the concept of Nature requires that we understand Gaia, for example, not as the mother of the Titans from her mating with the Sky, but as the symbolic name of an actually living entity.
In short, according to Gaia theory, “The entire surface of the earth including life is a self-regulating entity”—this includes not only organic life, “not the biosphere alone,” but “the whole thing, life, the air, the oceans, and the rocks.” Lovelock clarifies the difference between the biosphere and Gaia as such: “The biosphere is the three-dimensional region where living organisms exist. Gaia is the superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks.” Alternately, he offers this definition: “Gaia is a complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet. The maintenance of relatively constant conditions by active control may be conveniently described by the term homeostasis.” What, then, is a “superorganism?” Lovelock answers: “These are bounded systems made up partly from living organisms and partly from nonliving structural material. A bee’s nest is a superorganism and like the superorganism, Gaia, it has the capacity to regulate its temperature.”

Lovelock takes the Earth’s ability to regulate its temperature and atmospheric constitution to be of the utmost importance: it indicates homeostasis. Homeostasis is the tendency of a system to maintain internal stability, owing to the coordinated response of its parts to any situation or stimulus that would tend to disturb its normal condition or function. That is, the coordinated response of the parts of the system to disturbance gives rise to the ability of the system to regulate its internal environment and to maintain a stable condition of properties such as temperature and chemical composition. It was while Lovelock was working for NASA with Dian Hitchcock on developing techniques
for detecting life on other planets (specifically, in this case, Mars) that the importance of the stability of atmospheric composition and temperature came home to him. He writes:

Our results convinced us that the only feasible explanation of the Earth's highly improbable atmosphere was that it was being manipulated on a day-to-day basis from the surface, and that the manipulator was life itself. The significant decrease in entropy—or, as a chemist would put it, the persistent state of disequilibrium among the atmospheric gases—was on its own clear proof of life's activity. Take, for example, the simultaneous presence of methane and oxygen in our atmosphere. In sunlight, these two gases react chemically to give carbon dioxide and water vapour. The rate of this reaction is such that to sustain the amount of methane always present in the air, at least 1,000 million tons of this gas must be introduced into the atmosphere yearly. In addition, there must be some means of replacing the oxygen used up in oxidizing methane and this requires a production of at least twice as much oxygen as methane. The quantities of both of these gases required to keep the Earth's extraordinary atmospheric mixture constant was improbable on an abiological basis by at least 100 orders of magnitude.

Here, in one comparatively simple test, was convincing evidence for life on Earth, evidence moreover which could be picked up by an infra-red telescope sited as far away as Mars. The same argument applies to other atmospheric gases, especially to the ensemble of reactive gases constituting the atmosphere as a whole. The presence of nitrous oxide and of ammonia is as anomalous as that of methane in our oxidizing atmosphere. Even nitrogen in gaseous form is out of place, for with the Earth's abundant and neutral oceans, we should expect to find this element in the chemically stable form of the nitrate ion dissolved in the sea. . . . Nevertheless, considered solely as a life-detection experiment, atmospheric analysis was, if anything, too successful. Even then, enough was known about the Martian atmosphere to suggest that it consisted mostly of carbon dioxide and showed no signs of the exotic chemistry characteristic of Earth's atmosphere. The implication that Mars was probably a lifeless planet was unwelcome news to our sponsors in space research.

Of course the fact that Mars was eventually found to be exactly as Lovelock predicted he takes as evidence that his theory is correct. But this is far from the most convincing evidence he offers. Rather, "The history of the Earth’s climate is one of the more compelling arguments in favour of Gaia’s existence." Not only is this account compelling evidence, it is also fascinating on its own.

Life appeared on earth some three and one-half aeons ago, Lovelock informs us. An aeon is one thousand million years. “We know from the record of the sedimentary
rocks that for the past three and a half aeons the climate has never been, even for a short period, wholly unfavorable for life. Because of the unbroken record of life, we also know that the oceans can never have either frozen or boiled.” Consequently, the temperature of the earth “has always been much as it is now,” apart from glacial periods, which primarily affected only thirty percent of the Earth’s surface in any case.9 Yet—and this is crucial to note—“during the three and a half aeons of life’s existence on the Earth, the Sun’s output of energy will have increased by twenty-five percent.” This means that absent any atmospheric regulation—if the Earth depended solely on solar radiation for its temperature—the Earth’s temperature should have increased by the same amount, well beyond the range amenable for life. Yet life exists. Thus there must be atmospheric regulation on Earth. Hence, Lovelock concludes, “unless organisms occupy their planet extensively and evolve with it as a single system, the conditions of their tenancy are not met. The system of organisms and their planet, Gaia, for short, must be able to regulate its climate and chemical state.”10

The same holds true of the chemical composition of the atmosphere as for its climate—it changes along with the arrival of new forms of life to maintain the conditions necessary for that life, even where the mechanical interactions of the constituent elements of the atmosphere would lead us to expect just the opposite. Again, according to Gaia theory, this is because life co-evolves with its environment to maintain the homeostasis necessary for the continuation of life. This conclusion is echoed by Lynn Margulis (a biologist and collaborator with Lovelock) and Dorion Sagan, who write:

Life extends over the planet as a contiguous, but mobile, cover and takes the shape of the underlying Earth. Life, moreover, enlivens the planet; Earth, in a very real sense, is alive. This is no vague philosophical claim but rather a physiological truth of our lives. . . . Each breath connects us to the rest of the
The biosphere, which also ‘breathes,’ albeit at a slower pace. The biosphere’s breath is marked daily by increasing carbon dioxide concentrations on the dark side of the globe and decreasing concentrations on the lighted side. Annual breathing is marked by the passing of the seasons . . . Taken at its greatest physiological extent, life is the planetary surface. Earth is no more a planet-sized chunk of rock inhabited with life than your body is a skeleton infested with cells.\textsuperscript{11}

As such, Lovelock maintains, “Life and its environment are so closely connected that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately.”\textsuperscript{12} Gaia is alive, and, as Margulis writes, “the Earth as Gaian regulatory physiology transcends all individual organisms”—even human beings.\textsuperscript{13}

In the end, the self-regulation of the Earth’s temperature and climate are life processes characterized by homeostasis. Organisms and superorganisms regulate their internal conditions in much the same way, by taking in energy (for Gaia, this is solar energy; for us, it is food) and utilizing that energy in a series of complex chemical interactions. Later in this chapter we will consider the application of Tillich’s ontology of life—analyzed in Part One, Chapter II, under the heading “The Ontological Structure of Life.” First, though, let us briefly consider how Gaia regulates its own temperature and climate.

\textit{The Life Processes of Gaia}

In the earliest stages of life on the planet Earth, Lovelock explains, gasses like carbon dioxide kept the planet warm and above water’s freezing point. In addition, the Earth was darker in color and thus absorbed more light, also warming the planet. As Lovelock explains, “The proportion of sunlight reflected into space is called the albedo, or whiteness, of a planet. If its surface is completely white, it will reflect all sunlight to space and will be very cold. If it is completely black, all sunlight will be absorbed and it
will be warm. A change in the albedo could obviously compensate for the lesser heat of a
dimmer sun.” This helped keep the Earth “warm and comfortable for embryo life.” Even
taken together, however, these features of the earliest days of life on Earth do not explain
how it is that the Earth has maintained homeostasis while the sun’s output has increased.
“It is where they break down that we catch our first glimpse of Gaia,” Lovelock writes,
“or at least the need to postulate her existence.”

It is worth quoting him at length throughout this section, as he summarizes the
activity of Gaia across entire epochs with scientific awareness beyond my own. He
begins with the earliest appearance of life:

Once life began, it probably established itself in the sea, in the shallow waters, the
estuaries, river banks, and wet lands. From these earliest habitable regions it
spread to encircle the entire globe. When the first biosphere evolved, the
chemical environment of the Earth inevitably began to change. Like the nutrients
in a hen’s egg, the abundant organic chemicals from which life first evolved
would have supplied the infant creature with the food needed for its early growth.
Unlike the chick, however, for life there was only a limited supply of food beyond
the ‘egg’. As soon as vital key compounds grew scarce, the infant would have
been faced with the choice of starving or learning to synthesize its own building
blocks from the more basic raw materials of the environment, using sunlight as
the driving force.

The need to make choices of this kind must have occurred many times and
fastened the diversification, independence, and sturdiness of the expanding
biosphere. It may also have been during this time that the idea of predator and
prey and of food chains first evolved. The natural death and decay of organisms
would have released key materials to the community at large, but some species
may have found it more convenient to gather their essential components by
feeding on the living. The theory of Gaia has developed to the stage where it can
now be demonstrated, with the aid of numerical models and computers, that a
diverse chain of predators and prey is a more stable and stronger ecosystem than a
single self-contained species, or a small group of a very limited mix. An essential
feature of these new Gaian models is a tight coupling between the organisms and
their material environment. If these findings are true, it seems likely that the
biosphere diversified rapidly as it evolved.

One important consequence of this ceaseless activity of life would be the
cycling through the atmosphere of the atmospheric gasses carbon dioxide and
methane . . . carbon and nitrogen would be fixed and deposited on the sea floor as
organic detritus . . . Some of the hydrogen released by the breakdown of ammonia
would transfer to other elements, principly to oxygen to form water, and some would form hydrogen gas itself and escape into space. . .

Here, of course, it is important to remember Lovelock’s disclaimer that the language of evolution making “choices” and of Gaia formulating “ideas” is metaphorical. The point is that through evolution a system of organisms and their environment evolved so as to be able to alter the chemical composition of the biosphere itself. As a consequence of the activity of a diversity of life-forms, certain gasses—like carbon dioxide—are fixed and stored in what will eventually become sedimentary rock and even oil, and other gasses—like hydrogen and oxygen—are released from their bonding with other elements in the atmosphere and freed to bond yet again. All of this alters the atmosphere, and can alter it beyond the ranges necessary for life:

The use of the carbon dioxide blanket for food would have lowered the planetary temperature and, as freezing temperatures were approached, increasing ice and snow cover would rapidly raise the Earth’s albedo, and thus the reflection of sunlight to space. With a 25% less luminous sun, a runaway world-wide fall in temperature would be inevitable. . . . If on the other hand the infant Gaia had over-compensated for feeding on the atmospheric blanket by producing some other green-house gas, like methane, then, even with a weaker sun, runaway heating could have taken place, with the same vicious circle operating in reverse. . . Gaia would have to learn by trial and error the art of controlling its environment, at first within broad bounds and later, as control was refined, by maintaining it near the optimum state for life. . . .Investigations of simpler systems such as a beehive or a man suggest that temperature control would probably operate through the combined application of many different techniques rather than through any single one. The true history of these very remote periods will never be known. We can only speculate on the basis of probability and in the near-certainty that life did persist and enjoyed an equitable climate.

All of this speaks to the ways in which life co-evolves with its environment such that the conditions for life are preserved. If there is excessive oxygen but not enough carbon dioxide, then creatures that utilize oxygen are favored over those that utilize carbon dioxide, and vice versa, lowering the concentrations of the excessive gasses. As
temperatures rise those organisms that are dark colored and thus trap heat are selected against as opposed to those whose lighter coloring reflects heat, again adjusting for optimal conditions. As the pendulum swings the process reverses, punctuated by catastrophic events.

But does this “selection for optimal conditions” bring the idea of Gaian sentience in through the back door? Darwinian “survival of the fittest” does not select for a certain atmospheric condition, after all, but only for fitness in a particular environment. “To many scientists Gaia was a teleological concept, one that required foresight and planning by the biota,” Lovelock himself notes. “This was a final condemnation. Teleological explanations, in academe, are a sin against the holy spirit of scientific rationality; they deny the objectivity of Nature.”\(^{17}\) Of course, we have discussed some problems with the mechanistic understanding of the “objectivity of Nature” insofar as it separates what is essentially united and leads to insoluble problems predicated on that separation, such as a lifeless, mechanistic understanding of the physical itself. Still, we do not want to make of Gaia a mythological goddess, cognitively planning for the future of evolution, either—this would be to re-mythologize Nature. Is the Gaia theory guilty of this charge, though? Not at all. Indeed, we have just noted intimations of the argument that co-evolution of the sort described by Gaia theory can work along the lines of natural selection without entailing a teleological \textit{sentience} “selecting for” a particular atmospheric composition. Lovelock illustrates this point with the parable of Daisyworld.

Daisyworld is a mathematical model of a simplified world dominated by three types of daises—dark, light, and neutral colored—in which the mean temperature is “strictly determined by the average shade of the color of the planet.”\(^{18}\) The model was
not developed to give an accurate account of precisely how Gaia regulates its climactic and chemical homeostasis (it is far too simple to do that) but to show that such regulation can occur absent planetary, teleological sentience. That is, we do not need to mythologize Gaia into a sentient being to assert that Gaia can and does self-maintain in a way characteristic of life as such. Here again we will quote Lovelock at length, allowing him to describe Daisyworld in his own words.

Picture a planet about the same size as the Earth, spinning on its axis and orbiting, at the same distance as the Earth, a star of the same mass and luminosity as the Sun. . . . This is the planet Daisyworld, so named because the principal plant species are daisies of different shades of color: some dark, some light, and some neutral colors in between. The star that warms and illuminates Daisyworld shares with our Sun the property of increasing its output of heat as it ages. . . . Daisyworld is simplified, reduced if you like, in the following ways. The environment is reduced to a single variable, temperature, and the biota to a single species, daisies. If too cold, below 5º C, daisies will not grow; they do best at temperatures near 20º C. If the temperature exceeds 40º C, it will be too hot for the daisies, and they will wilt and die. The mean temperature of the planet is a simple balance between the heat received from the star and the heat lost to the cold depths of space in the form of long wave infrared radiation. . . . The mean temperature of Daisyworld is, therefore, simply determined by the average shade of color of the planet. 19

Lovelock then takes us to the beginning of Daisyworld, just as he did for the origins of life on our own planet…

Imagine a time in the distant past of Daisyworld. The star that warms it was less luminous, so that only in the equatorial region was the mean temperature of bare ground warm enough, 5º C, for growth. Here daisy seeds would slowly germinate and flower. Let us assume that in the first crop multicolored, light, and dark species were equally represented. Even before the first season’s growth was over, the dark daisies would have been favored. Their greater absorption of sunlight in the localities where they grew would have warmed them above 5º C. The light-colored daisies would be at a disadvantage. Their white flowers would have faded and died because, reflecting the sunlight as they do, they would have cooled below the critical temperature of 5º C.

The next season would see dark daisies off to a head start, for their seeds would be the most abundant. Soon their presence would warm not just the plants themselves, but, as they grew and spread across the bare ground, would increase the temperature of the soil and air, at first locally and then regionally. With this
rise of temperature, the rate of growth, the length of the warm season, and the spread of dark daisies would all exert a positive feedback and lead to the colonization of most of the planet by dark daisies. The spread of these daisies would eventually be limited by the rise of global temperatures to levels above the optimum for growth. . . . In addition, when global temperature is high, white daisies will grow and spread in competition with the dark ones. The growth and spread of white daisies is favored then because of their natural ability to keep cool.

With Daisyworld, then, Lovelock shows that the temperature of a planet can be regulated by natural selection selecting for fitness—in this case, the ability to either absorb or reflect sunlight—such that the optimal temperature can be maintained without teleological “planning” on the part of the biosphere. In addition, when the model was complexified to include a predator-prey pair of species—rabbits to eat daisies and foxes to eat rabbits—the dynamics were repeated. Again, Daisyworld self-regulated.

It is important to re-emphasize that Gaian self-regulation effected through evolution is not simply a matter of the biosphere, though in the simplified Daisyworld model it is only daisies, rabbits, and foxes represented. Rather, Gaian evolution is co-evolution, in which organic life and its environment evolve together:

Evidence shows the Earth’s crust, oceans, and air to be either directly the product of living things or else massively modified by their presence. Consider how the oxygen and nitrogen of the air come directly from plants and microorganisms, and how the chalk and limestone rocks are the shells of living things once floating in the sea. Life has not adapted to an inert world determined by the dead hand of chemistry and physics. We live in a world that has been built by our ancestors, ancient and modern, and which is continuously maintained by all things alive today. Organisms are adapting in a world whose material state is determined by the activities of their neighbors; this means the changing environment is part of the game. . . . On a local scale adaptation is a means by which organisms can come to terms with unfavorable environments, but on a planetary scale the coupling between life and its environment is so tight that the tautologous notion of “adaptation” is squeezed from existence. The evolution of the rocks and the air and the rest of the biota are not to be separated.
Thus—and we will return to this point—when Tillich says that “the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process,” he is supported by Lovelock’s Gaia theory. Life as process is more encompassing that the life processes of individual organisms.

Finally, let us note that Gaia evolves through the process of punctuated evolution. Perturbations in the biosphere—for instance, such as the planetary event that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs—can have dramatic consequences and change the course of evolution in unexpected ways: “Gaia theory would expect the evolution of the physical and chemical environment and of the species to proceed always together. There would be long periods of homeostasis with little environmental change or speciation, interrupted by sudden changes in both. These punctuations could be driven internally as a result of the evolution of some powerful species, like humans, whose presence alters the environment, or as a result of external change as from the impact of planetesimals.”

Thus the contemporary ecological problem enters Gaia theory: we have evolved to the point that we are capable of creating perturbations in Gaia’s life process that could have catastrophic results. In Daisyworld, there comes a time when “flower power is not enough”: “As the star that shines on Daisyworld grows older and hotter, the proportion of dark to light daisies changes until, finally, the heat flux is so great that even the whitest daisy crop cannot keep enough of the planet below the critical 40º C upper limit for growth.” Though our sun may take aeons to reach the point that co-evolution can no longer correct for its increasing heat, our own activities may speed the breakdown. “The invasion of a tropical forest by humans with chain saws who would replace it with an agricultural ecosystem is a traumatic act. It is like destroying the ecosystem of the
[complex Daisyworld] model with twenty species and replacing it with a monoculture of dark daisies only,” Lovelock warns. “Both in Daisyworld and in the forest, such an act could lead to premature death by overheating, especially if it took place at a time or place when the sun was hot.”25 Hence, though Lynn Margulis chides those who seek to “save the Earth” for their pride—“No human culture, despite its inventiveness, can kill life on this planet, were it even to try”26—the trauma caused by our practices could well create a perturbation of such force as to change the direction of evolution and destroy us along with much today’s biosphere. Moreover, if it is the case that all life processes are good insofar as they have their own goods—as we argued is in fact the case in Chapter II under the heading “Grades of Being and Value”—then such a trauma would represent an evil of unprecedented scale.

**Gaia, Being, and Life**

In Part One, Chapter II, we discussed Tillich’s understanding of life under the heading, “The Ontological Structure of Life.” There we saw that for Tillich life is described in terms of the actuality of being—and, most relevantly, in terms of the actualization of potentiality. We further saw that in the actualization of potentiality being-itself self-manifests in, to, and through finite being(s). Thus, for Tillich, life is universal: “The actualization of potential is a structural condition of all beings,” he writes. As such, “the universal concept of life is unavoidable. Consequently, the genesis of stars and rocks, their growth as well as their decay, must be called a life process.”27 In describing Gaia we have given concrete content to this claim—we identified this in connection to Lovelock’s reminder that “Evidence shows the Earth’s crust, oceans, and
air to be either directly the product of living things or else massively modified by their presence. The evolution of the rocks and the air and the rest of the biota are not to be separated.”

We further saw that for Tillich to be is to exist, and to exist is to stand out from both non-being and potential being in actuality. To be is to be becoming: becoming actual, always in the process of coming out of and going into both potentiality and nonbeing. In short, it is in the process of life that potentialities become actualized. Further, we saw that the process of life involves three moments, analogous in the divine life and finite creaturely life: self-identity (or self-integration), self-alteration (or creativity, or growth), and return (or self-transcendence). In these moments life reveals itself as a centered movement ahead, an out-going into always further actualization, a growth that does not lose the self-identity of the changing center. As Tillich puts the point, “this going-out takes place in such a way that the center is not lost in the outgoing movement. The self-identity remains in the self-alteration. . . . So we can distinguish three elements in the process of life: self-identity, self-alteration, and return to one’s self. Potentiality becomes actuality only through these three elements in the process which we call life.” Thus we defined life in ontological terms as follows: life is the process by which potentiality becomes actuality, marked by self-identity, self-alteration, and return.

We can see these moments in the life of Gaia quite clearly, which allows us to affirm that Gaia is, in Tillich’s terms, ontologically a life process in and of itself. Above we saw that Lovelock defines Gaia in this way: “Gaia is a complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on
this planet. The maintenance of relatively constant conditions by active control may be conveniently described by the term homeostasis.” As we further saw, this homeostasis is achieved through the process of co-evolution—insofar as Gaia is said to be alive, then, specific Gaian life processes such as global respiration are products of the process of co-evolution, which can thus be said to be the life process of Gaia as such.

In the process of co-evolution, all that becomes actual is an actualization of the creativity (or latent potentialities) of Gaia—all terrestrial being belongs to Gaia as the material and organic ground, itself rooted in the ultimate ground of being. All co-evolution belongs to and proceeds from the organic unity that is Gaia. This is the principle of *self-identity* as manifest in the process of co-evolution. As a product of evolution, human beings nonetheless cognitively separate themselves from not only the ultimate but also the proximate, material ground of their being—it is thus that we recognize Nature as that from which we are apart, even while, in Gaian self-identity, we are a part of it. Thus the Man-Nature divide is the re-instantiation of the subject-object separation, as we saw in Chapter V. This is a product of *self-alteration* as manifest in the process of co-evolution—in evolution Gaia drives into ever more complex and encompassing forms of life. In the human animal that process of alteration is taken to the extreme that a product of evolution knows itself precisely as apart from the natural processes, one of which of course is the process of evolution that produces the human being. Finally, when we are conceptually able to recognize the reality of our situation in terms of simultaneous estrangement and belonging, and recognize that estrangement precisely *as* a mode of belonging, we cognitively and spiritually return to Gaia on the other side of the transformative experience of separation. Hence can we return to the
ultimate ground of our being through an awareness of the place of our own being in relation to both the ultimate and proximal grounds of that being.

A second feature of Tillich’s understanding of life is his rejection of the metaphorical hierarchy of being in exchange for the metaphors, dimensions, realms, and grades. As we saw, this allows him to reject the problematic dualism that finds its way into much of the sort of theology and philosophy that accepts the idea of the hierarchy of being, according to which various aspects of life are divided into dualities, one of which is assumed to be higher on the chain of being and thus more valuable. Hence, often the masculine is associated with spirit, reason, and intellect, while the feminine is associated with the Earth, emotion, and the material, with the former assumed to be rightfully dominant over the latter. This tendency is central to the feminist critique of much Western thought, and rightfully so. Tillich goes out of his way to reject it, not only because it is socially problematic but because it is ontologically flawed. It radically separates God from nature, and since human beings are made in the image of God, humanity is separated from both God and nature: “There is no organic movement from one to the other; the higher is not implicit in the lower, and the lower is not implicit in the higher. The relation of levels is that of interference, either by control or revolt.”

Instead, Tillich develops an understanding of the different forms of being in terms of realms, dimensions, and grades. Life, according to this view, is a multidimensional unity in which a variety of realms of being come together in every entity, from rock to plant to man to star. The various “realms” are determined by the dimensions most fully realized in them; the various dimensions are determined according to the particular modification of the ontological categories by which human beings grasp being as such.
This is developed at extensive length in Chapter II and need not be re-examined. Rather, the point here is that this understanding allows Tillich to refer to various grades of value in being without appealing to the problematic metaphor of hierarchy. Just so, the separation of God, human being, and Nature named Gaia that is a common product of that hierarchical model is entirely undercut in terms of the process of the self-manifestation of being-itself described here. In our analysis, and quite opposite to the hierarchical understanding, Gaia as the proximal (though not ultimate) ground of our being is closer to God than human being, and Gaia transcends the human, though not the divine, even while the human being transcends Gaia.

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter II, this understanding allows us to affirm that all life has intrinsic value, if not to an equal degree, in virtue of having its own good. More complex and encompassing grades of being actualize greater degrees of potentiality and are capable of pursuing a wider and deeper range of goods. Hence they can be said to have a higher grade of value while still maintaining that their value is not absolute, and that “lower” forms of life may have ethical claims in relation to higher. Thus, as we saw, it is necessary to seek to balance a variety of considerations, including what is good for the integration and health of life as such, the goods of other lives, one’s own goods, and to always do so with as clear as possible understanding of the various degrees of actualized potentiality at each grade.

It is from these considerations that we can say that Gaia transcends human being ontologically, even though Tillich says that human being transcends nature. Gaia is ontologically as well as chronologically prior to human being in terms of manifestation, for human being as spiritual being becomes possible only on the basis of the actuality of
an near-infinite number of earlier actualizations—Gaia is the organic condition of the possibility of human being, and Gaia was alive and growing toward the conditions that gave rise to human being for aeons before the set of potentialities that determine the realm of spirit became not only possible but actual. Moreover (and more to the point), the grades of being encompassed by Gaia are far more complex than those encompassed by human being, precisely because Gaia encompasses human being. The human spirit—individual and universal—has its being in and through the life of Gaia. All that human beings are, do, and achieve is part of the expression of divine creativity that is Gaia. Indeed, human being is separate from Gaia—named Nature—only in our own estrangement.

The claim that Gaia ontologically transcends human being seems to be directly in contrast with what Tillich himself writes—a potential pitfall for an analysis grounded squarely in Tillich’s ontology. Tillich’s view on this point is quite clearly stated in passages such as this:

Man is able to create a world beyond the given world; he creates the technical and the spiritual realms. The dynamics of nonhuman life remain within the limits of natural necessity, notwithstanding the infinite variations it produces and notwithstanding the new forms created by the evolutionary process. Dynamics reaches out beyond nature only in man, . . . His creativity breaks through the biological realm to which he belongs and establishes new realms never attainable on a nonhuman level.32

Yet considering the development of the concept Nature in Part Two and our description of Gaia in the current chapter, it can be answered that when Tillich suggests that human being transcends nature by creating a world beyond the given world, this can apply only to nature as constituted by and defined in terms of separation. In other words, this view, though quite correct, refers only to nature as object over and against the human subject—
and this is only half of what Nature is. For Nature is that from which we are apart, true, but that from which we are apart even as and only because we are a part of it. “Dynamics reaches out beyond nature only in man,” writes Tillich, and this means that human being transcends the nature from which it is apart, but also that the self-transcendence of Gaia, of which we are a part, is effected in and through human being.

Therefore, when we name Gaia the symbolic correlate to our concept of Nature, as developed in Chapter V, we mean that Gaia is the symbol not only of nature in the limited sense of non-human wild, but in the full sense as that which we recognize first through estrangement from it, even while we always belong to it. This, again, is analogous to our relation to the divine life, and it is utterly essential: it is only by means of such self-separation—only by the self-alteration that makes the ground of being other to itself—that self-manifestation is effected. In the divine life the Godhead goes out from itself in separation, becomes finite and other than itself in creation, and returns to itself as Spirit. The life of Gaia, too, is a process of going out and return. As the ground, venue, and substance of co-evolution Gaia is a unity, a self-identity. In evolution Gaia grows through self-alteration into ever more complex forms of life, eventually giving rise to the ultimate self-alteration—Gaia manifests in and through that which knows itself primarily as other to its own ground, the human over and against the natural wild. In the spiritual turn back to nature, that which belongs to Gaia seeks to return to the proximal ground of its being. In the deepest forms of this drive, the return to Gaia is a return not only to the proximal ground but through the proximal to the ultimate ground of being—a nature spirituality that ends with the return to Gaia is, in Tillich’s terms, idolatrous. (We will
consider this turn back to the proximal and ultimate grounds of being in more depth in Chapters VIII and IX.)

According to this model, it is in and through human being that Gaia goes ahead and returns to itself in creative growth and self-transcendence. Again, this is analogous in structure to the dialectical dynamic of the divine life. Both share the three moments of self-identity, self-creation, and self-transcendence. These three moments are discussed in regard to the divine life in Chapter II under the heading, “The Divine Life.” In regards to the dialectical dynamic of life as manifest in Gaia, we can say the following. Gaia is self-integrated as the ultimately unified, intricately interdependent, “complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil.” Gaia is self-creative in co-evolution, developing ever more complex forms of life culminating (so far) in an entity capable of transcending its biological nature precisely by separating itself from its own ground. Gaia is self-transcending in just this creation, the human capacity for spirit, which seeks its own (and, by extension, Gaia’s) ultimate self-transcendence in the return to its ground on the other side of the transformative separation that constitutes the very condition of its own being.

**Co-evolution and Complex Participation**

We will return to the idea of co-evolution as a manifestation of divine love in Tillich’s terms in Chapter IX, “Religious and Moral Implications of Gaia,” where we will examine Lynn Margulis’s understanding of evolution as a function of symbiosis in terms of the drive toward the reunion of that which is separated. Here, though, let us end the current chapter dedicated to reading Gaia theory ontologically, with some observations
concerning complex participation as it relates to co-evolution. We saw in Part One, Chapter II, that the panentheistic relation of the divine life and creaturely life is one of dual participation, according to which God participates in finite life as its power of being and finite life is a particular manifestation of, and thereby participates in, the dialectical dynamic of the divine life. Thus we wrote that finite being participates in the self-manifestation of being-itself because being-itself participates in finite being as its generating and empowering ground. This can more easily be stated symbolically. *The divine life participates in finite life* as the creative power of being of finite life. *Finite life participates in the divine life* as a particular instance of its self-manifestation, self-creation, and self-transcendence.

In Part Two, Chapter IV, we complexified the idea of dual participation with regards to the third term, nature, which was as yet undefined. There we explained complexified dual participation as follows. God, nature, and the human interpenetrate—each participates in the other two, and the other two participate in each. *God participates in the human being* insofar as the human being is a concrete manifestation of the divine creativity of the power of being. *The human participates in the divine life* for the same reason, from the other direction—and also because the human experience is a central element in the divine experience, and insofar as the spiritual union with the divine is the re-union of the divine with itself on the other side of separation. *Nature participates in the human being* insofar as the human being is one concrete instance of natural fecundity, insofar as the human being takes its sustenance and material reality from nature, and insofar as the human species is a product of the natural process of evolution. *The human being participates in nature* for the same reasons, from the other direction—and also
because the human being, in its activity, affects and alters nature. \textit{God participates in nature} in the same way that God participates in the human being, insofar as nature is a concrete manifestation of the divine creativity of the power of being. \textit{Nature participates in the divine life} just as the human does, but on a more encompassing level, as the arena not only of human experience but of all experience whatsoever.

We have further named Nature by means of the symbol, Gaia. This term has its own concrete content which is not symbolic. In Chapter VIII we will consider precisely the way in which this name refers both to an actual entity—the life-process of the planet Earth—and functions as a symbol for the concept of Nature. What is important to note here is that in naming and describing Nature as Gaia we have given concrete content to the participatory role of nature in both the divine and the human life. We have also come to be able to substantiate the claim that the human participates in both the divine life and the life process of Gaia as the place of their self-awareness. This is accomplished by Gaia by means of co-evolution—that is, the organism capable of separating itself from its own ground to the degree that the subject-object structure of cognition is sufficiently developed for self-awareness and global awareness is a product of evolution.

Now, Tillich, following Kant, recognizes that the ontological categories allow human being to grasp and shape reality through the application of reason. Kant, further, has long served to warn us against seeking to extend reason beyond the realm of possible experience. This has generally been taken as a check on theology—natural theology in particular—and indeed it is. Traditionally, natural theology has been understood as primarily involving pursuit of the rational demonstration of the existence of God—or, if not so bold a project was affirmed, natural theology has been held to be able to provide
rational reasons for the faith of believers.\textsuperscript{34} In any case, Kant’s critique of metaphysics has severely undermined the attempt to prove the existence of God, and, while it may be possible to give rational grounds for faith, Kant’s Antinomies of Pure Reason have showed that there is just as much reason—in terms of rationalistic argument—to believe both ways. For his part, Tillich denies that any proof that God exists can be discovered because, “However it is defined, the ‘existence of God’ contradicts the idea of a creative ground of essence and existence. The ground of being cannot be found within the totality of beings,” and this is precisely what it means to exist. Thus, “God does not exist. He is being itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him.”\textsuperscript{35} Instead, as we discussed at length in Part One, the question of God that results in the ontological, cosmological, and teleological proofs is a product of anxiety—that is, the question of God is the ontological question.

Of course, this project does not seek to prove the existence of God. Rather, here we are concerned with the charge that to affirm that human awareness is the realm of divine self-awareness is to take human cognition, by which we shape experience, to correspond to a reality beyond experience. But the one need not entail the other. That is, we need not affirm that we know God in God’s self to affirm that human cognition is the realm of divine self awareness. Rather, we do affirm that the divine life is the self-manifestation of being-itself in and through creation, which is manifest in Gaia and in and through Gaia manifests in and through us—thus, our awareness, too, is a mode of the divine life. By following the theological question through the ontological, existential questions, we have begun not with metaphysical principles but with the experience of ontological anxiety.
Thus, a key element of Kant’s critique is captured in his statement that “the understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, nature.”\textsuperscript{36}

We can accept this statement with a provision derived from the insights of science: the theory of evolution forces us to modify this point, maintaining that Gaia has given rise to \textit{just such minds} as are capable of organizing their experience in this way—that is, minds that are capable of recognizing the regularities of nature and regulating their behavior as such. Thus, the very consciousness that organizes experience into objectively valid patterns and laws (which Kant calls nature), and thus finds those patterns and laws in nature, has been produced \textit{by} nature in just such a way as to be able to do this. And, as our analysis has shown, when we view God not as supernatural first cause but as the ground and power of being, we are led to the conclusion that Gaia—and Gaia’s products, including human consciousness—are expressions of the self-manifestation of the power of being. This is a part of the divine life and the life of Gaia—our understanding of nature is Gaia’s self-awareness, and it is incumbent upon us that we recognize it as such.
Notes

2. Ibid., xi.
4. Ibid., xii.
5. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 17.
9. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 21.
18. Ibid., 35.
19. Ibid., 34-36.
20. Ibid., 36.
21. Ibid., 33.
24. Ibid., 37.
25. Ibid., 52.


32. Ibid., 1:180-81.


CHAPTER VIII:
GAIA AS RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

Where does the power of being become manifest and how can it be measured? The answer is that the power of being becomes manifest only in the process in which it actualizes its power. In this process its power appears and can be measured. Power is real only in its actualization, in the encounter with other bearers of power and in the ever-changing balance which is the result of these encounters. Life is the dynamic actualization of being.

—Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*

**Gaia, Symbol, and Nature**

In the previous chapter we discussed the Gaia theory as developed by James Lovelock ontologically in terms of the divine life and complex dual participation. In the current chapter we will consider Gaia as a symbol for the self-manifestation of being-itself. We already discussed this in Part One in terms of our guiding symbol, the divine life, in which we considered the self-manifestation of being-itself in terms of a dynamic dialectic analogous to organic life processes, to which we returned in the previous chapter. Here, though, we will discuss Gaia as a symbol of a particular way of understanding the self-manifestation of being-itself—that is, through the lens of the concept of Nature. Thus, the divine life is a religious symbol correlated to the ontological, conceptual understanding of the dialectical dynamic of the self-manifestation of being-itself; Gaia is a religious symbol whose content is made concrete in the Gaia theory and is correlated to the modern understanding of Nature in the wake of the scientific revolution. To unpack this correlation we will begin by reading the symbol of Gaia through Tillich’s six characteristics of a symbol. Hence, this chapter will center primarily on fifteen short pages: Chapter III of Tillich’s
Dynamics of Faith, “Symbols of Faith.” Though brief, those pages are extremely fruitful, as will be seen.

In addition, the role of the current chapter should be noted. As with Chapter II in Part One and Chapter V of Part Two, this middle chapter of Part Three plays a central, pivoting role. In Part One, the chapter on the divine life moved us from the grounding ontology through the guiding symbol into the religious character of Tillich’s panentheism. In Part Two, the chapter on the concept of Nature moved us from Tillich’s (often implicit) view of nature to nature as a religious idea. In Part Three, this chapter moves us from an ontological treatment of the Gaia theory through an analysis of the symbolic function of Gaia into our concluding discussion of the religious and moral implications of Gaia. Hence, though this chapter will be brief, it will play an important role as pivot, or perhaps better, as bridge.

Symbol and Name

As we have seen above, for Tillich any statement we can make about God must be a symbolic statement. Though in Volume One of his Systematic Theology Tillich claims that the statement “God is being-itself” is the only non-symbolic statement we can make about God, in Volume Two he backs away from that to the more nuanced claim that the statement marks the boundary line at which the non-symbolic (conceptual) and symbolic (religious) meet.¹ Here, conceptual language presents a question, which can only truly be answered in the symbolic response. The symbolic response cannot be conceptual, for then it would be a question—but neither can it be taken literally, for then it would be conceptual. Hence, that which is
ultimate must be expressed in symbols—“Man’s ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate.”

It must be emphasized here that “Gaia” is not a symbol of the ultimate but of the living manifestation of the ultimate. That is, Gaia must be read as a symbol of the self-manifestation of the power of being encountered as nature. This is the meaning of the phrase, “Gaia is a symbol of Nature,” which is precisely the correlation we seek to make. Gaia is a symbol of the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being as we understand that manifestation as Nature. In Chapter Five we considered Nature conceptually as a product of estrangement and defined it as an expression of the dynamic of the divine life. Nature is that from which Man is estranged, and that from which Man takes his organic being. She is also that which unifies her own internal separation of Man from Nature. In short, Nature is that from which we are apart even as we are a part of it. Hence Nature re-instantiates (or, perhaps better, replicates, reproduces, or represents) the estrangement of the human being from its divine ground more proximally, though finitely. The name Gaia, then, symbolizes that conceptual formulation in a single word.

**Gaia and the Six Characteristics of Symbols**

According to Tillich, the first and second marks of symbols are that “they point beyond themselves to something else,” and that they “participate in the reality of that to which they point.” Gaia participates in the reality of the divine life (or, conceptually, the dynamical, dialectical self-manifestation of being-itself) as a particular manifestation, not as the process of manifestation as such. The process of
manifestation as such we might name cosmos, if by cosmos we understand the totality of structured being, which in turn is understood to be the self-manifestation of being-itself. Cosmos can be called “nature” in its character of being determined by universal laws—i.e., the laws of physics—but generally when we hear “nature” we think of the non-human wild… that is, we think of terrestrial wilderness.

Hence Gaia could be called one instance of nature, albeit the closest, and our clearest and most immediate example of the interdependent unity of life. Gaia points to interdependence—a manifestation of divine love—to participation, and to groundedness. Gaia participates in the life of the cosmos, which in turn participates in the divine life. As an image, then, Gaia is a model of the part-of/apart-from dichotomy that is at the center of our concept of Nature. Gaia is the proximal ground from which we are estranged, and points beyond itself to the ultimate ground. Insofar as we constitute the venue for the self-awareness of Gaia, furthermore, Gaia can be said to be estranged from the ultimate ground of being—thus Tillich can write, “Man reaches into nature, as nature reaches into man. They participate in each other and cannot be separated from each other. This makes it possible and necessary to use the term ‘fallen world’ and to apply the concept of existence,” which entails separation as a necessary condition, “to the universe as well as to man.” But, again, Gaia models our condition at a higher ontological level—and as Gaia’s seemingly infinite creativity is manifested as finite contingency, Gaia points to and participates in the infinitely creative and unconditioned ground.

The third and fourth characteristics of symbols, Tillich writes, is that they open “levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us,” and simultaneously unlock
“dimensions of our own soul” corresponding to the opened dimensions of reality.\textsuperscript{5} Gaia as a symbol opens up the reality of our own life as belonging to a greater life process—and, since Gaia points to the divine life in which all life participates, the greater life process to which our lives belong is both the life of Gaia and, ultimately, the divine life. Though lip-service may be given, this reality is closed off to us in the concept of Nature captured in the challenging setting-upon characteristic of our modern, technological-industrial society. The challenging setting-upon expresses the human ability to grasp and shape nature to dangerous extremes, thus exacerbating estrangement; Gaia opens up to us what was lost in the modern development of the concept.

Moreover, our belongingness is not merely a fact about material reality—not even the most committed proponent of the mechanistic view of the physical would deny that our organic, biological, bodily corporeality shares a substance with material reality. What they deny is that our \textit{spirit} shares such a substance. Gaia, on the other hand, shows us that the spiritual is not unconnected to the organic. As Tillich writes, all dimensions of life “meet at the same point,” and “there is no conflict” between the material and the spiritual—“the unity of life is seen above its conflicts.”\textsuperscript{6} Our collective spirit is Gaia’s spirit, and Gaia’s spirit is the divine Spirit flowing in and through us. Thus, if our self-awareness is Gaia’s self-awareness, as we suggested in the previous chapter, then challenging setting-upon is a limitation not only of nature but of ourselves. As Heidegger noted, it makes even human beings into objects, thus denying our essential subjectivity. To view our spirit as separate from the life process of which we are a part is to reinforce the existential estrangement that leads us to seek
our “true” home in a fantastic supernatural realm. It is to turn even further from our ground and to deny our essential unity with the divine life. Thus, in opening up the realm of belongingness in reality and in our souls, Gaia directs us back to our belonging to a life process that includes us. As the life process of Gaia is a manifestation of the divine life, we are directed back through our belonging to Gaia to our essential belonging to the divine.

The fifth and sixth characteristics of symbols is that they “cannot be produced intentionally . . . They grow out of the individual or collective unconscious.” And, just as they grow, when they no longer work as symbols they die. Thus, as Lovelock writes:

By now a planet-sized entity, albeit hypothetical, had been born, with properties that could not be predicted from the sum of its parts. It needed a name. Fortunately the author William Golding was a fellow villager. Without hesitation he recommended that this creature be called Gaia, after the Greek Earth goddess . . . In spite of my ignorance of the classics, the suitability of this choice was obvious. . . . I felt also that in the days of Ancient Greece the concept itself was probably a familiar aspect of life, even if not formally expressed.

As we have seen in Chapter V, under the heading “Nature and the Ancient Greeks,” nature was seen by them as organic, as interconnected, and as possessed of mind. However, though the ancient Greeks did see nature in organic terms, as we have seen, for the most part they did not have an explicit understanding of what it meant to be natural. The insight that nature should be understood organically was lost with the scientific revolution, which required as a condition of its possibility a strict divide between subject and object and resulted in the mechanistic view of nature. Thus, unfortunately, this divide was not simply methodological but metaphysical.
The time for this insight has returned, transformed by the scientific revolution that temporarily hid it. In the second half of the twentieth century the disastrous effects of rampant industrialism were becoming impossible to ignore. In 1962 Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, helping to launch the environmental movement. As early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, John Muir and Aldo Leopold were advocating for wilderness preservation. In perhaps the most touching of Leopold’s words, he describes the moment this insight dawned on him:

My own conviction on this score dates from the day I saw a wolf die. . . . In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy; how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable side-rocks.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. 9

Beginning to understand life from the mountain’s point of view led Leopold to formulate one of the most influential pieces of environmental ethics to date, “The Land Ethic.”

Published in 1948, “The Land Ethic” argues that the health of the land is a central ethical consideration and that human beings are only part of the biotic community—not its sole value. Arne Næss extended this insight, coining the term “deep ecology” in 1973, providing a more formal theoretical basis for the insight that the living environment is an ethical subject deserving of moral consideration. It is as part of this trajectory that Lovelock and Margulis formulated the Gaia theory in the 1960s and ’70s—like Leopold and Næss, they communicate the insight that the unity of life on the planet Earth is *one life.*
This insight, therefore, did not spring out of the imaginations of Lovelock, Margulis, and Golding alone. It was ripe to be named with the name of an ancient goddess, a mythological name for the living earth, born of the universe, giving birth to sky and sea, and mother of all life on her surface. And what was named in these symbolic terms was a scientific insight whose time had come, some three and one-half centuries after Francis Bacon promised “to stretch the deplorably narrow limits of man's dominion over the universe to their promised bounds.” This was the insight that one of the guiding tenets of the scientific revolution was wrong—that the idea that we are separate from a nature meant to be mastered was unsustainable and simply false, scientifically, ontologically, and ethically—even though it is science itself that gives content to the symbol expressing that insight. That symbol may well die when it is no longer meaningful; where Nature is no longer expressive of our technological and industrial estrangement the symbol may fall away as unnecessary. The future cannot be known. For our time, however, Gaia is a powerful symbol and an urgent call.

**God and Gaia**

Of course, the danger of such a powerful symbol is that of idolatry. “Idolatry,” as Tillich defines it, “is the elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditioned is taken as unconditional, something essentially partial is boosted into universality, and something finite is given infinite significance.” Making Gaia into the ultimate elevates the living Earth—or, by extension, the living cosmos—to ultimacy, and in so doing becomes pantheism. And in Chapter III we saw that Tillich rejects pantheism on the grounds that “it denies the infinite distance between the whole of finite
things and their infinite ground, with the consequence that the term ‘God’ becomes interchangeable with the term ‘universe’ and therefore is semantically superfluous.” It is the power of being that is divine—Gaia is sacred as a self-manifestation of divinity. Gaian pantheism, which we will discuss in the next chapter, worships the finite manifestation and binds God to the structure of that manifestation.

That God (or being-itself) can only be described symbolically means that as a concept being-itself is ultimately empty. We discussed this point at length in Chapter I. Being-itself names the depth of the structure of being, as David Klemm and William Klink make clear—but as Heidegger shows, “the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss.” Tillich expands this insight when he writes, “The question, ‘What precedes the duality of self and world, of subject and object?’ is a question in which reason looks into its own abyss—an abyss in which distinction and derivation disappear.” When reason looks to its own ground it finds the limits of reason, the inability of reason to grasp and shape its own ground. Nature, symbolized as Gaia, can of course be grasped and shaped, if only by making it an object and limiting its essential reality.

Gaia is finite, the cosmos itself is contingent, but the experience of recognizing the unity of life on the planet Earth, and recognizing that life as participating in the divine life, points to an attribute of the divine—that divine creativity expresses itself in and through all life, not simply through human life. Thus we can affirm that not only Adam—“Man”—was created in the image of God, but that Gaia, too, is “in the image.”
“In the Image...”

“Man is the image of God in that in which he differs from all other creatures, namely, his rational structure,” Tillich writes. “Man is the image of God because in him the ontological elements are complete and united on a creaturely basis, just as they are complete and united in God as the creative ground. Man is the image of God because his logos is analogous to the divine logos, so that the divine logos can appear as man without destroying the humanity of man.” But as we saw in Chapter I, the logos is not mere cognitive reason, but the structure of being as such. Gaia, as a single life, also completes and unites the ontological elements on a creaturely basis.

In Chapter I, we discussed the ontological elements at length. Here let us briefly consider precisely how it is that Gaia can be said to complete and unite the ontological elements such that we can claim that Gaia is created “in the image of God.” We will recall that there are six ontological elements in three polarities: individualization and participation; dynamics and form; freedom and destiny.

Individualization refers to the ontological structure of centeredness. Gaia is centered as a single life process, and in awareness in human being. Clearly, Gaia participates in “the natural structures and forces which acts upon it and which are acted upon by it.” Moreover, in human awareness Gaia goes beyond basic biological processes. It is vital to remember that it was basic biological processes that gave rise to minds capable of going beyond them—hence in a very real and applicable sense the human being’s capacity to transcend basic biological processes is Gaia’s capacity. This too is a mode of participation, according to Tillich: in the ability to grasp and shape reality the human mind participates in the rational structure
of being in a creative capacity. And this is a classic sense in which human beings are created “in the image of God.”

Form is that by virtue of which a thing is the thing that it is. That is, entities are determined by a structure and set of limits to be the things that they are. Plainly Gaia, as a “planet-sized entity,” is determined according to structure and limit. Dynamics, Tillich writes, “appears in man’s immediate experience” as “vitality”—the “power which keeps a living being alive and growing.” Vitality manifests the participation of the power of being in individual beings as “the creative drive of the living substance in everything that lives toward new forms.” In co-evolution Gaia undoubtedly reveals this creative drive toward new forms, and does so as a manifestation of the power of being. This drive is actualized in a way that maintains prior forms. Hence homeostasis is maintained in and through co-evolution—it is in the dynamic drive to new forms that Gaia maintains its form.

To be free means to be a self experiencing itself as a structured whole in “deliberation, decision, and responsibility.” This can only happen in human being—hence Gaia completes freedom only where the human being experiences itself as a structured whole essentially united with the life of Gaia. That this is not incompatible with Tillich’s theology is evident in his language reflecting a “romantic” attitude involving a “mystical participation in nature.” Destiny means everything that one is, all that has shaped a person’s being, including the past exercise of freedom. Thus the history of co-evolution that gives rise to human freedom, a freedom that is biologically constrained even as it transcends basic biological processes, constitutes the destiny of Gaia.
Accordingly, we can see that Gaia does complete each of the ontological elements—with the provision that they are fully completed in the human being to which co-evolution has given rise. And, as a single, centered, planet-sized entity, Gaia also unites the ontological elements. As such, we can affirm that, in keeping with Tillich’s own criteria, Gaia is indeed “created in the image.” Let us now discuss in more detail precisely what this means.

Image and Qualities

In his book, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred*, Langdon Gilkey, too, argues that nature is created in the image of God. By this he means that nature is “a sign of God, a symbol of God, just as are we.” It is in nature that we first recognize the qualities that we attribute to God: in the sky and the heavens we find marks of transcendence and infinity; in nature’s creative and threatening power we find the overwhelming power of being; in the unitary life processes of Gaia we find an image of the divine life; in nature’s order we find divine wisdom. This, for Gilkey, indicates the value of nature: “It incarnates and embodies—as we do—powers and values that we associate with God and therefore respect, revere, and cherish: infinity, power, life, order, uniqueness or individuality, and self-affirmation. This integrity, this value in and for itself, must be respected; nature, like humans, must become an end as well as a means.”

We can make the same point with regard to Tillich’s understanding of symbols. Tillich notes that the symbol of God contains 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.” He continues, “God is the basic symbol of faith, but not the only one. All the qualities we attribute to him, power, love, and justice, are taken from finite experience and applied symbolically to that which is beyond finitude and infinity.”

We will consider the way in which creation through co-evolution is a direct manifestation of divine love as an ontological force further in the next chapter; here let us briefly look at how the symbol of Gaia manifest the qualities power, so as to provide us elements of concrete experience by which we can apprehend being-itself in its self-manifestation.

It is not difficult to see how Gaia expresses power. In Chapter I we discussed Nietzsche’s will to power in organic terms. There we quoted Zarathustra: “And life itself told me this secret: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that which must overcome itself again and again . . . where there is perishing and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for the sake of power!’”

A tree sacrificing those parts of itself which are dead for the sake of ever higher growth manifests this will to power—and Gaia, sacrificing species for greater flourishing does the same. The entire growth process of co-evolution is the flourishing of the power of being on a planetary scale. And power is not simply manifest as growth and creation, but threat as well. Gaia reveals the dangerous nature of power in earthquake and flood, in the fact that life necessarily feeds on life, and ultimately in the profligate character of evolution.

The Correlation of Symbol and Concept
Nature is primarily understood today as the “non-human wild,” but also as the source of our organic, material being. As such, Nature instantiates dual participation, estrangement, and life as process. Nature has been defined as a product of estrangement, and as that from which we are a part of and apart from. Thus, understanding Nature as the non-human wild presents only our estrangement, an estrangement that we exacerbate with the challenging setting-upon characteristic of technological industrialization. Gaia, on the other hand, symbolizes Nature as a whole, as a unity. Thus, when we correlate the symbolic name, Gaia, with the concept of Nature, we point to both Nature as that of which we are a part and that from which we are apart.

Clearly, Gaia names that proximal ground of our being of which we are a part. We are evolved beings, products of the life process of Gaia. Our biological life and our spiritual life depend for their actualization on the prior actualization of preceding realms of being. The continuation of our lives depends upon the continuation of Gaia’s life. The food we eat, the air we breathe, the very climate that allows for the conditions of life, are all products of Gaia’s life process. As a single life-process, moreover, Gaia encompasses all that we are, all of our potentialities (as long as we remain terrestrial beings, at any rate)—we belong to Gaia in every part of our beings.

Yet Gaia is also that from which we are apart. The very capacity to recognize the life of Gaia as a single life process depends upon the separation of subject and object that allows for any abstract recognition at all. This is a product of estrangement, true, but the actualization of estrangement in awareness is itself a product of evolution. That is, it is only through the process of co-evolution that beings capable of cognitively recognizing and emotionally feeling separation as estrangement—as something to be overcome in
reunion—are possible at all. Thus, when we recognize Gaia we simultaneously recognize our belonging and our separation. In seeking reunion with Gaia we seek reunion with the divine, and in seeking reunion with the divine we must begin with an experience of the unity of all life. The religious quest for reunion must begin with an awareness of belongingness to Gaia.

Thus, when we say that the symbolic name Gaia corresponds to the concept of Nature, we mean that Gaia symbolizes Nature in both elements. Gaia is not simply the living Earth, from which we stand apart as human beings, to protect or destroy. Nor is Gaia simply that life process of which we are a part, for we transcend the merely biological in intentional vitality. Instead, Gaia is that which we transcend as a part of it—in our transcending Gaia, Gaia transcends itself. Gaia is that which we recognize from without as a unity that encompasses us. In our definition of Nature in Chapter V we discussed the way in which Nature is a deeply ambiguous concept, constitutively sliding between two opposing senses—that to which we belong and that from which we are separate. Gaia correlates to the concept of Nature precisely in that ambiguity, and expresses the estrangement underlying the concept in the impulse toward reunion.

More than simply the ambiguity of the concept of Nature, though, Gaia also symbolizes certain features of divine Logos, the second moment of the divine life. “The divine life is the dynamic unity of depth and form,” Tillich writes. “In mystical language, its inexhaustible and ineffable character, is called ‘Abyss.’ In philosophical [that is, conceptual] language the form, the meaning and structure element of the divine life, is called ‘Logos.’ In religious language the dynamic unity of both elements in called ‘Spirit.’” Elsewhere, he writes that “God manifest” refers to “the mystery of the divine
abyss expressing itself through the divine Logos.” Our analysis has shown that being-itself is self-manifest in and through structured being, or Nature.

As “God manifest,” logos names “meaningful structure.” That is, “It unites meaningful structure with creativity.” For Heidegger, from whom Tillich draws extensively, meaning has an as-structure: we see a thing as a particular thing in a world relative to other things and tied up in our own projects. Here, for our purposes, philosophy and theology come together. “Philosophy,” for Tillich, “deals with the structure of being in itself; theology deals with the meaning of being for us.” Logos unites the structure that makes entities the things that they are, the structural totality and unity of all entities, with meaning in terms of concernful dwelling in and with. Not only are things manifest as specific things endowed with import, but the actuality of being as such is manifest as an expression of divine creativity. It is this meaning—and with it, value—of creation, or Nature, in and for itself that is symbolized in the figure of Gaia.

And, again, the Logos as the second moment of the dialectical figure of the Trinity—as Tillich understands it—is the moment in which the Godhead becomes other than itself through taking nonbeing into itself. In this moment, structure is manifest through separation, which allows things to be the things that they are and thus manifestations of divine creativity. This is the meaning of Tillich’s panentheism, his crucial assertion that “Through the separation within himself God loves himself. And through separation from himself (in creaturely freedom) God fulfils his love of himself—primarily because he loves that which is estranged from himself.” The second moment of the dialectical dynamic of life is growth through separation—separation is a mechanism of growth, since to grow is to become other than what one was while yet
remaining what one is. The Logos is thus the principle of self-creation in the divine life. And, as we have seen, Nature is the expression of divine creativity—structured being living as an expression of the power of being that is the movement of the divine life.

If Gaia is a symbol of Nature, therefore, Gaia is a symbol for the second moment of the divine life, understood conceptually as Logos. Nature is growth; Nature is the direct expression of divine creativity; Nature is discovered as meaningful structure in and through separation in tension with union. Gaia thus symbolizes the actualization of structured being in, through, and as life process, created out of and grounded in the inexhaustible depth of the ground of being, which itself is the principle of the unity of being. Gaia symbolizes the process of the concrete actualization of the structure and meaning of being in unity, which is the self-manifestation of being-itself in and through the integration and overcoming of nonbeing. The actualization of being gives rise to those beings that can recognize themselves as separate, estranged, in spite of their essential unity with being—this is the dynamic that is at the root of the modern concept of Nature, and recognition of the life of Gaia is the symbolic recognition of the reality of that process as transpiring in and through physical, material processes. All of this was the subject of Part One, there exhaustively analyzed, and therefore this symbolic correlation is firmly grounded in Tillich’s systematic ontology.
Notes

3. Ibid., 47.
10. Francis Bacon, “The Masculine Birth of Time.”
12. Ibid., 2:7.
16. Ibid., 1:176.
19. Ibid., 1:184.
22. Ibid., 152.

26. Ibid., 1:159.

27. Ibid., 1:251.

28. Ibid., 1:22.

29. Ibid., 1:282.
CHAPTER IX:
RELIGIOUS AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF GAIA

Man actualizes his finite freedom in unity with the whole of reality. This actualization includes structural independence, the power of standing upon one’s self, and the possibility of resisting the return to the ground of being. At the same time, actualized freedom remains continuously dependant on its creative ground. Only in the power of being-itself is the creature able to resist nonbeing. Creaturely existence includes a double resistance, that is, resistance against nonbeing as well as resistance against the ground of being in which it is rooted and upon which is dependent.

—Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume One*

**Green Religion**

In the beginning was hot, dense singularity. And then was rapid expansion, and the universe cooled as it expanded. Matter condensed from energy, elemental particles coalesced into bodies—the stars were born, and they gave birth to the stuff of the planets. Upon at least one of these planets there arose life. Life grew on that planet through a symbiotic evolution of organisms and their environments, until finally there arose a species that could question it all. But that species felt itself exiled, cast out from some unremembered paradise, and it longed to return. In all aspects of our existence we are always already apart from that which we are a part of—this is the meaning of estrangement, a theme that is central to Tillich’s understanding of existence, as we saw in Chapter VI.

*The Green Religious Impulse*

Estrangement reveals two related movements, a movement away and a movement back towards. In the movement away we turn away from the infinite ground of our being—God—and toward our finite selves and the finite contents of our world. In this
movement we elevate ourselves to the center of creation. We seek to transcend the limits of our finitude on the basis of our own power. Thus the turn away from the infinite and toward the finite expresses the human temptation to become centered and grounded only in ourselves. But of course in this we are doomed, and we know ourselves to be doomed even in the attempt. As such, even concupiscence reveals the impulse to return, the turn back towards. “Every individual, since he is separated from the whole, desires reunion with the whole. His ‘poverty’ makes him seek for abundance. This is the root of love in all its forms.”¹ Even in the attempt to draw the whole of our world into ourselves in the misplaced love of finitude, we long for the union of our being with the ground of being. This is why estrangement is inherently tragic, for it shows us to ourselves as doomed.

It can be argued—and in fact Tillich does argue—that Christianity is rooted in the deep awareness of existential estrangement. Exile was a central theme in the historical self-understanding of the people Israel, and those living under the Roman occupation in the first century would have felt themselves living in exile even in their own land. And as the doctrine of the Messiah took on universal significance, so too did the early Christians feel themselves exiled in this very world—the world was understood in terms of sin and condemnation, and they encouraged each other to separate themselves from worldly concerns and prepare themselves for their true home. This “true home,” however, has commonly been understood in mythological terms—whether as the new Earth ruled by the messianic king, the eternal bliss of an other-worldly heaven, or both. Tillich, however, in keeping with his rejection of biblical literalism, rejects this formulation: “In a vision of the universe which has no basis for a tripartite view of cosmic space in terms of earth, heaven, and underworld, theology must emphasize the
symbolic character of spatial symbols, in spite of their rather literal use in Bible and cult,” he writes. Thus, the hope for return remains always fragmentary and anticipatory. Moreover, that to which we return cannot be an other-worldly “special place,” but must manifest itself in and through this world. Again, this is ingredient in Tillich’s panentheism.

Now, Tillich’s is an ontological description of the ultimate oneness of being and the condition of the possibility of multiplicity and finitude arising out of the primordial, eternal unity. But science, in the form of ecology, which finds its deepest expression in the Gaia theory of James Lovelock, brings us to a concrete awareness of our “linked-in-ness.” Ecology teaches us scientifically what religion teaches us metaphysically or spiritually or ontologically through symbols … that all life is interconnected and interdependent. Yet at the same time that science is teaching us ecology and Gaia theory, it has driven our ability to master nature—however provisionally and temporarily—to new extremes. Our increasing dependence upon technology sets us ever farther apart from the source of our organic being, even while ecological awareness directs us back. Thus with the ambiguous fruit of the scientific project, marked on the one hand by ecological consciousness and on the other by incessant technologization, the drama of estrangement as the tension between the turn away and the turn back is revealed in the most concrete of terms. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else today, we see the dual movement away from that which transcends us and the accompanying desire for reunion.

Religiously, this desire for reunion with the proximal ground of our organic being is expressed in the increasing trend toward the greening of religion, in whatever form. Green religion, or nature religion, can run the gamut from neo-pagan animism to radical
environmentalism taken up with crusading fervor. It can also take the form of green Christianity. As Bron Taylor writes in his excellent overview of the phenomena, *Dark Green Religion*, “Nature religion is most commonly used as an umbrella term to mean religious perceptions and practices that are characterized by a reverence for nature and that consider its destruction as a desecrating act.” This could involve a direct worship of nature, but it need not. From Tillich’s perspective, it is important to delineate an approach that avoids idolizing nature, while still affirming its status as an expression of divine creativity and avoiding the tendency of Christianity to undervalue nature. The symbol of Gaia is a symbol of that to which we are essentially connected, from which we come, away from which we are turned toward our technology, from which we are estranged even as we depend upon it for our very life, and to which we seek return in the green religious impulse.

“Dark Green” Religion

Green religion can involve the actual worship of nature—whether the worship of the totality of nature, as in pantheism, or the worship of particular objects in nature such as the sun, moon, or terrestrial features, as in some forms of neo-paganism—but it need not. Indeed, Christianity is seeing its own greening. The current project is deeply rooted in one systematic Christian theology, and has taken pains to show that Gaia points to the ultimate ground of being as its self-manifestation and to avoid making Gaia the object of worship in place of God. Bron Taylor, however, distinguishes between green religion in general and what he terms “dark green religion.” “It is important to distinguish between green religion (which posits that environmentally friendly behavior is a religious
obligation) and dark green religion (in which nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care).”

The vast majority of green Christianity is (light) green religion, not dark green. It is based on three basic principles—divine ownership, the goodness of creation, and human stewardship—and is generally referred to as “stewardship” theology. According to the idea of stewardship, the verse generally cited as reflecting the dangerous anthropocentrism of Christianity (Genesis I: 26 – 28, which charges human beings to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to “rule over” all the plants and animals upon it) is interpreted in a more environmentally friendly way. For example, a report from the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, an evangelical think tank connected to the Southern Baptist Convention, comments on the verse in question as follows:

Humanity is charged with procreating and multiplying the human race and then acting with dominion over all the creation. But, as already seen, dominion is to be carried out through servant stewardship. . . . It is evident that man is not to simply leave nature to itself, but rather, man is directed to work the land while at the same time caring for it. Man is created in the image of God, and by using what God has provided, he can bring forth unrealized beauty and accomplishment to God’s creation. This human-induced development, in turn, points back to the amazing creation with which the Lord blessed humanity, emphasizing God’s design for it to provide humans with goodness and prosperity.

This sort of language is representative. Yet while it is more ecologically friendly than some statements of dominion, it remains anthropocentric. Creation is amazing, yes, but its value seems to derive solely from God’s divine plan that nature provide humans with “goodness and prosperity,” notwithstanding the divine declaration that the natural world is “good.” Apparently, it is “good” only in relation to the eventual creation of humans.

The ethical and religious position of this dissertation, on the other hand, is decidedly “dark green.” Nature is held to be sacred, not as God or as being-itself but as
“God manifest,” as an expression of divine creativity and a manifestation of the power to be, and therefore possessed of intrinsic value apart from its ability to provide for human prosperity. This is not in and of itself incompatible with Christianity, insofar as it holds the natural world to be sacred as a vehicle of divine revelation and as an expression of divine creativity, but it does hold that nature is due reverence and care in and of itself, entirely apart from anthropocentric valuations.

Taylor goes on to list the characteristics of dark green religion as separated from the more conventional green religion, as follows:

Dark green religion is generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings. This value system is generally (1) based on a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related; (2) accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe; and (3) reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence . . . Commonly, dark green religious and moral sentiments are embedded in worldviews and narratives that are believed to cohere with science—but they are often grounded in mystical or intuitive knowledge that is beyond the reach of scientific method.6

All of this is clearly manifest in what has gone before. Of particular importance, in Chapter II we discussed at some length the idea that all life has intrinsic value on the basis of having its own good, and thus established the biocentric position as grounded in Tillich’s ontology of life. In the current chapter we will develop that position further with specific reference to environmental ethics, especially as influenced by Aldo Leopold’s “The Land Ethic.” First, however, let us turn to the question of Gaia, growth, and love as an ontological reality.
Gaia and Divine Love

At the heart of “all genuine religion,” according to Tillich, is the drive toward the reunion with God, the turn back toward the ground of being beyond the turn away effected in estrangement. This reunion involves self-transcendence in the vertical direction—but, as we have seen, the condition of the possibility of (human) vertical self-transcendence is the self-transcendence of Gaia in the horizontal direction. Thus human self-transcendence is God’s returning to God’s self on the other side of the separation that constitutes God’s self-expression in and through creation (to write symbolically).

Striving for reunion, which is at the heart of all genuine religion, Tillich names “love.” That which we strive to be reunited with is God, the ultimate. Hence faith—which is the state of being “ultimately concerned,” or being “grasped by” the ultimate—shares the same concern with love: that is, the reunion with God. Therefore, Tillich writes, “One is ultimately concerned only about something to which one essentially belongs and from which one is existentially separated. . . . The concern of faith is identical with the desire of love: reunion with that to which one belongs and from which one is estranged.” And love is not simply a matter of the individual—it is an ontological force.

Love as Ontological

The ontological status of love binds it to power—that is, the power of being—as the driving force of growth, or creation, or self-transcendence. Moreover, love is the central consideration of ethics, a primary subject of this chapter. This can be established with a brief series of steps, and the implications of the interconnection of love, power, and ethics will be developed in the remainder of the chapter.
First: For Tillich the *fundamental good* is expressed in the law of love—“Every moral decision is a risk because there is no guarantee that it fulfills the law of love, the unconditional demand coming from the encounter with the other one.”

Second: Love, as we have seen, shares its concern with faith and is at the heart of all genuine religion—“Love is the drive toward the unity of the separated.”

Third: Love is the foundation of power—“The power of being is not dead identity but the dynamic process in which it separates itself from itself and returns to itself. . . . The process in which the separated is reunited is love. The more reuniting love there is, the more power of being there is. Love is the foundation, not the negation, of power.”

Fourth: Power, as we saw in Part One, is ontologically the overcoming of non-being, the condition of being as such; and as we saw in Part Two, power is the principle of creation and growth, expressed in *life*—“Power is the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negation,” and, “the power of being becomes manifest only in the process in which it actualizes its power. . . . Life is the dynamic actualization of power.”

Fifth: Justice, the concern of ethics, safeguards the exercise of love and power in the drive toward growth as a medium for creation as self-transcendence, which ultimately drives toward reunion through self-separation—“Love reunites; justice preserves what is to be reunited. It is the form in which and through which love does its work.”

These five points form the ontological and religious ground of a biocentric, holistic ethics that extends ethical consideration beyond the human. Love is an ontological power, the foundation of life, growth, and ethical concern. “Life is being in actuality,” Tillich writes, “and love is the moving power of life.”

We have discussed life at length in Chapter II—it is a crucial element of the analysis—and we have
discussed it in terms of growth understood as self-transcendence, a universal phenomenon. Growth and evolution have been considered as examples of self-transcendence in the horizontal direction, and the self-transcendence in which the human being manifests its essential unity with the divine in ecstasy has been called self-transcendence in the vertical direction. That is, while horizontal growth is the condition of the possibility of vertical self-transcendence, it is specifically and only in and through the human being that Gaia transcends itself in the vertical direction. Yet Gaia has been shown as a life process characterized by self-transcendence, which is growth as the instrument of creation. Therefore, if love is the moving power of growth—since life is the dynamic actualization of power, and love is the foundation of power—then growth on the horizontal plane must be an expression of love, the “drive toward the unity of the separated.”

In short, the manifestation of the power of being must take place in and through self-transcendence (growth), driven by love (the drive toward the unity of the separated), which in turn depends upon separation and difference. Since the growth process of Gaia is co-evolution, this process must be a product of love—that is, it must be a product of the union of the separated on the horizontal such that it can give rise to the organic conditions of the possibility of self-transcendence on the vertical. And so it is—this ontological claim is given content in the Gaian understanding of evolution developed by Lovelock’s collaborator, Lynn Margulis, in her theory of symbiogenesis.

*Love as the Driving Force of the Growth of Gaia*
In her book *Symbiotic Planet*, Lynn Margulis argues that a primary driver of Gaian evolution is symbiogenesis. Symbiosis is “the system in which members of different species live in physical contact.” Symbiosis, she notes, is ubiquitous and crucial to life as we know it:

Not only are our guts and eyelashes festooned with bacterial and animal symbionts, but if you look at your backyard or community park, symbionts are not obvious but they are omnipresent. Clover and vetch, common weeds, have little balls on their roots. These are the nitrogen-fixing bacteria that are essential for healthy growth in nitrogen-poor soil. Then take the trees, the maple, the oak, and the hickory. As many as three hundred different fungal symbionts, the mycorrhizae we notice as mushrooms, are entwined in their roots. Or look at a dog, who usually fails to notice the symbiotic worms in his gut. We are symbionts on a symbiotic planet, and if we care to, we can find symbiosis everywhere. Physical contact is a nonnegotiable requisite for many differing kinds of life.

Here, we see that symbiosis affects the entire balance of the land—plants cover the soil, animals eat the plants, scattering seeds in their droppings, nitrogen-fixing bacteria adhere to plant roots in a symbiotic relationship of mutual benefit, and the soil is made more fit for the growth of plants.

In the natural world similar cycles are repeated endlessly, giving rise to a vast, fractal set of interlocking systems, the entirety of which is Gaia. A fractal pattern is a complex pattern in which details of its structure viewed at any scale repeat elements of the overall pattern—this is a fundamental feature of the development of the natural world: phenomena as diverse as plants, rivers, galaxies, clouds, weather, population patterns, crystal growth, and the branching of bronchial tubes and the circulatory system reveal fractal patterns. These re-iterating patterns give rise to systems within systems within systems. Moreover, Gaia is part of a yet larger set of systems—Gaia is energized
by the sun, and the gravitational pull of the moon affects tides and the tides affect the weather, which is a mechanism of the Earth’s respiration.

In these fractal cycles of symbiosis some fascinating couplings manifest. Margulis relates this intriguing example as an instance of symbiosis that is just a step short of symbiogenesis:

In Brittany, on the northwest corner of France, and along beaches bordering the English Channel is found a strange sort of seaweed that is not seaweed at all. From a distance it is a bright green patch on the sand. . . . A small hand lens or low-power microscope reveals that what looked like seaweed are really green worms. . . . The flatworms of the species *Convoluta roscoffensis* are all green because their tissues are packed with *Platymonas* cells; as the worms are translucent, the green color of *Platymonas*, photosynthesizing algae, shows through. Although lovely, the green algae are not merely decorative: they live and grow, die and reproduce, inside the bodies of the worms. Indeed they produce the food that the worms “eat”. The mouths of the worms are superfluous and do not function after the worms hatch. . . . The symbiotic algae even do the worm a waste management favor: they recycle the worms uric acid waste into nutrients for themselves. Algae and worm make a miniature ecosystem swimming in the sun. Indeed, these two beings are so intimate that it is difficult, without very high-powered microscopy, to say where the animal ends and the algae begins.

Here, as Margulis points out, we find a fractal phenomenon. The worm and algae form a “miniature ecosystem,” the constitutive features of which—interdependence and symbiotic homeostasis—are repeated in the more complex and encompassing ecosystems of which they are parts.

And it is from such tightly interdependent symbiosis that symbiogenesis can work. “*Symbiogenesis*, an evolutionary term, refers to the origin of new tissues, organs, organisms—even species—by establishment of long-term permanent symbiosis,” Margulis explains. This is an idea Ivan E. Wallin developed, she relates, continuing: “*Symbiogenesis brings together unlike individuals to make large, more complex entities. Symbiogenetic life-forms are even more unlike than their unlikely ‘parents.’*
‘Individuals’ permanently merge and regulate their reproduction. They generate new populations that become multiunit symbiotic new individuals.” Margulis notes that “the idea that animal and plant cells originated through symbiogenesis” through the “permanent incorporation of bacteria” is no longer controversial. She simply extends the idea to argue that “new species arise from symbiotic mergers.” That is, “long-standing symbiosis led first to the evolution of complex cells through nuclei and from there to other organisms such as fungi, plants, and animals.” The remainder of her book is dedicated to providing evidence for this claim.

Thus we can imagine the life process of Gaia—co-evolution—as a product of symbiosis. Even if new species do not arise from symbiogenesis, at least complex animal and plant cells, the building blocks upon which all complex life does evolve, did do so. And co-evolution means nothing if it does not indicate that the process of evolution is a matter of the tightly-coupled interdependence of organisms with each other and their environments. Thus, even if new species do not arise as a direct result of symbiogenesis, co-evolution represents the union of the separated in increasing levels of fractal complexity. So it is that the life of Gaia is the direct manifestation of love understood as an ontological force: “Gaia, the system, emerges from ten million or more connected living species”—species that are, directly or indirectly, the results of the union of the separated—“that form its incessantly active body.”

**Love, Gaia, and Environmental Ethics**

Love, holds Tillich, is the driving force of life, the drive toward reunion of that which is separate. In the life process of Gaia this is shown concretely and *literally*—life
grows and transcends itself into ever more complex and more encompassing forms precisely as a mode of love, as both love and life are ontologically understood. Moreover, this horizontal self-transcendence provides the conditions of the possibility of ecstatic self-transcendence in the vertical direction, which is the self-love of God affected in and through the separation and the reunion of the human being and its ground. Thus the power of being manifests and affirms itself in the growth of Gaia, driven by and toward ever increasing love, for the human being is simultaneously the most aware of its estrangement and the being capable of individual ecstatic union.

Yet the necessity of separation also introduces the risk of disintegration as opposed to union. “Every new form is made possible only by breaking through the limits of an old form,” Tillich writes. “In other words, there is a moment of ‘chaos’ between the old and the new form. . . But relative chaos with relative form is transitional, and as such it is a danger to the self creative function of life.” This is the ontological root of the fact that life lives on life—“In every process of growth, the conditions of life are also the conditions of death.”27 Hence all growth has a factor of risk, and even this risk is ontological, since the life of nature is the expression of divine creativity, “God manifest.”28 “Symbolically,” Tillich writes, “one could say that even God, in creating, took the risk upon Himself that creation would turn into destruction.”29 Hence justice is united in function with love and power as that which “preserves what is to be united.”30 As such, finally, this ontological risk is manifest in ethical risk, for it can never be entirely certain that in our ethical deliberations we are balancing our actions such that growth and unity are preserved and promoted against disintegration and death: “Every moral decision is a risk,” Tillich explains, “because there is no guarantee that it fulfills
the law of love." Yet one thing is certain: our ethical deliberations are to be guided in accordance with love, and this love is not simply a feeling of affection between individual human beings but the driving force of all life, understood ontologically and universally.

*Types of Ethics*

The sort of ethical considerations suggested by a Gaian understanding rooted in Tillich’s existential ontology and theology can be considered consistent with the major types of ethical theory—natural law theory, utilitarianism, and deontology—in certain ways. In each case, though, it is important that the considerations guided by such an understanding involve extensionism—according to which entities other than human are understood to have ethical claims—and holism—according to which individuals are not the sole bearers of ethical claims, but “collectives” such as species and ecosystems are bearers of ethical claims as well. Of course the dissertation consists primarily of a constructive analysis of Tillich’s ontology; this is not a work of ethics. But considerations of ethical import are involved in the extension of the symbolic statement “created in the image of God” to non-human life, and in this final chapter we will pick out some of those implications. The purpose here is not to offer a detailed ethical theory as such, but to point to some important themes of the analysis as they bear ethical import. In the next section we will discuss the extension of ethical consideration as guided by the principle of the integrity of life as introduced by David E. Klemm and William Schweiker and by the “Land Ethic” of Aldo Leopold. First, though, we will briefly
consider some implications of our analysis for conventional ethical theories in terms of extensionism and holism.

First, let us look to natural law theory. Tillich writes in natural law language when he discusses “the good.” For Tillich, the good as such “must be defined as the essential nature of a thing and the fulfillment of the potentialities implied in it.”

As we saw above, for Tillich this involves creation, growth, self-transcendence—all of which amount to the same thing, and all of which are to be understood in terms of love as an ontological force, as the union of the separated. Moreover, “this applies to everything that is and describes the inner aim of creation itself.” In ethical terms, this suggests that the extension of ethical consideration beyond the human is essential. In Chapter II we showed that by virtue of being alive all living entities have “good of their own,” and thus intrinsic value and are due ethical respect. This is not to say that there is a divine mandate that things proceed in a particular way, nor is it to say that every “natural event” is unambiguously good. For example, hurricanes can be understood as deeply ambiguous in terms of “the good”—as part of the natural respiratory processes of the planet, hurricanes might be said to be “good” for Gaia, yet certainly “bad” for those caught in their paths.

For Tillich this ambiguity is central to life as such, and leads to the element of risk inherent in creation. “Every moral decision is a risk,” Tillich writes. The reason is that any ethical judgment will inherently involve a balance of competing interests, especially insofar as growth is manifest in the organic dimension:

The concepts of self-creativity and destruction, growth and decay, come into their own in the realms which are dominated by the dimension of the organic, for it is here that life and death are experienced. It is not necessary to confirm the fact as such, but it is important to point out the ambiguous interweaving of self-creation
and destruction in all realms of the organic. In every process of growth, the conditions of life are also the conditions of death. . . . The ambiguity of self-creation and destruction is not limited to the growth of the living being in itself but also to its growth in relation to other life. . . . This leads to the concept of struggle as a symptom of the ambiguity of life in all realms but most properly speaking in the organic realm and most significantly in its historical dimension . . . . Every look at nature confirms the reality of struggle as an ambiguous means of the self-creation of life. . . .

Hence, in the example of the hurricane, it would be “bad” to ignore the destructive force of the natural phenomenon, certainly—but it would not on that basis be “good” to seek to do away with hurricanes as such, or even individual hurricanes. The destructive force is a force for death viewed only from below; from above the hurricane is a force for life. Hence Tillich can speak in terms reminiscent of natural law theory without needing to posit an individual being named “God” who has a divine plan involving hurricanes and human behavior in response to them.

Second, let us consider utilitarianism. Classically, it involves the idea that in ethical judgments value should be awarded to those actions which produce the best consequences for the greatest number. The end of producing value suggests two separate types of value, as Joseph DesJardins, professor of philosophy at the College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University in Minnesota, explains: “Most value judgments are judgments of instrumental value; some act (for example, telling the truth) is valuable as a means (an instrument) to the end of producing some good. But there must be this good, something valued for its own sake, which is the end for which other acts aim. There must be something of intrinsic value by which we can judge our acts.” Again, we have argued that the “good-for-life” is intrinsically valuable, and that ethical considerations involve a question of balancing competing claims ultimately rooted in the intrinsic value of life as such. Following our ontological analysis, we argued that being alive is as a
manifestation of the power to be. That is, to be alive is to give expression to the power to be, which is grounded in and expressive of the self-manifestation of being-itself... or, in symbolic terms, to be alive is to live as an appearance of the divine life. To work against this is the ultimate expression of nihilism; hence, technological setting-upon is inherently nihilistic. But that is an aside—in terms of utilitarianism, such an analysis entails that “the end for which other acts aim” cannot be a merely human end, but must be in keeping with the promotion of life as such.

Finally, let us turn to deontology, according to which ethics are a matter of duty. Contemporary forms of deontology often involve considerations of rights. In this view, every right involves a corresponding duty. Hence rights and duties are correlative. In deontological terms, the intrinsic value of life can be said to entail a duty. Of course, in cases of conflicting rights (or, from the other side, duties), we need a process for prioritizing rights. One way is to maintain that rights protect interests, and then to rank those interests. For example, I might have an interest in maximizing the value of my property by selling certain rights to it to the shale-mining industry, while you might have an interest in drinking the water from the river downstream of my property. I have a right to dispose of my property as I see fit, which protects my interest in economic profit. You have a right to healthy drinking water, which protects your interest in continuing to live. It should be clear (though unfortunately it apparently is not) that the interest in continued life trumps the interest in maximal profit. When we extend ethical claims beyond the human, moreover, we see that not just your interest in continued health and life is at stake, but also all life that depends upon the health of the river—and possibly even the river itself.
That is, having granted intrinsic value to bounded life processes beyond the merely human, we may well be granting interests beyond the human realm as well. DesJardins writes, “Interests work for a person’s benefit and are objectively connected to what is good for that person.” Yet it is not only “persons” (if that means “humans,” and perhaps even if that means “consciously aware individual animals”) that have goods they pursue. In deontological terms, then, we could come to recognize duties to a variety of entities not generally accorded rights, including animals, trees, and perhaps even ecosystems—and, by this reasoning, Gaia itself. Their goods include healthy functioning, and by the logic of interests, rights, and duties, we should recognize their claims upon our behavior.

Holism and Extensionism

The point of the previous section was not to espouse any particular ethical theory above any other. Rather, the point is that all of these competing ethical theories are impacted by the ontological analysis we have developed, and each of them—whether natural law theory, utilitarianism, or deontology—must be broadened to involve ethical holism and ethical extensionism. In the most important sense, any ethical considerations grounded in our ontological analysis must be non-anthropocentric.

In Chapter II, under the heading of “Grades of Being and Value,” a case was made for extensionism without naming it that. Extensionism answers the question “What things count, ethically?” by extending the realm of the bearers of moral value beyond the human—in its ultimate extension (pun certainly intended), extensionism expands that realm to all forms of life. This is certainly not an original position—“Saint Francis in the
Christian tradition, the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, as well as numerous non-Western and Native American traditions, recognized to various degrees the possibility that beings other than humans should count.\textsuperscript{37} In fact, it could be argued that the modern certainty that \textit{only} human beings can have ethically relevant interests is directly rooted in the mechanistic view of nature characteristic of modernity, which holds that all non-human life is devoid of the prerequisite for moral consideration, whether we call that “mind” or “soul” or “reason” or “freedom.” Of course, then, rejecting that understanding of “nature” in favor of an organic model would entail the rejection of ethical anthropocentrism.

The case for ethical extensionism as it is grounded in our ontological analysis runs as follows. To be alive involves having a good: healthy flourishing, growth, self-transcendence. The interest in that good is an expression of the drive toward the good as such, as Tillich defines it, the inner aim of creation itself: self-creation as a drive toward the union of the separated. That drive is an expression of divine creativity; and hence it is intrinsically good not only for the being possessed of the drive, but also for the divine life as such. Hence, any life process that can be a \textit{whole}—centered and bounded—can and does have interests, and thus can and does stake an ethical claim.

Granted, life is inherently ambiguous—growth is always paired with destruction—and thus not all claims can be met. But all are worthy of consideration. Moreover, it is important that whole life processes—that is, those life processes that are bounded and centered—have such claims. This is because the good is defined in terms of flourishing, growth, and union (later we will speak in terms of \textit{integration}). Respiration does not flourish or grow; rather, respiration is a necessary condition of growth and
flourishing in those organisms that breathe. This is not to say that respiration is not a life process—it is, along with circulation, reproduction, ambulation, *et cetera*. But respiration as such is not intrinsically valuable—it has instrumental value—and the life and growth of the organism for which respiration is essential is the end toward which respiration is instrumental. That the boundaries of an organism are always porous does not speak against this, though it does speak to the fundamental interconnection of all life. (Or, in Tillich’s terms, the “multidimensional unity of life.”∗∗

Centered and bounded life processes, on the other hand, are not limited to organisms, though self-integration is “most manifest under the dimension of the organic.”∗∗∗ Here it is important to keep in mind that all nature must be understood in organic terms. While nature has as its first condition the actuality of the inorganic, as a process the self-manifestation of being-itself is a *living* process. The inorganic integrates in the process of actualizing the potentiality of the divine life, and thus Nature is inherently organic. As we saw in Chapter V, nature is not simply dead material organized in mechanistic determinism, but an organic process of becoming, or growth. Hence, any life process that reacts as a whole is ethically relevant, and a life process is a centered and bounded whole if it “develops its parts in balance under the uniting center and is forced back into balance if one part tends to disrupt the unity.”∗∗∗∗ This can be said of organisms and of Gaia—but it can also be said of ecosystems and of species. Therefore, not only individual organisms are subject to the benefits of ethical expansionism, but so too are ecosystems, and so too is Gaia.

Here we can speak, as Aldo Leopold does, of the mountain and the river as having ethical claims. Not only do those organisms that depend upon the health of the river have
an interest in that health, but the river itself has an interest in its own health. It is a
bounded and centered life process, consisting of numerous interconnected and
interdependent systems, themselves composed of organisms and their environments.
Indeed, each organism can be seen as just the same sort of phenomenon, a bounded and
centered system of interlocking and mutually interacting subsystems, themselves
composed of individuals and their environments. The river and the man are very much
the same in this regard. Thus, ethical extension on the basis of the intrinsic value of
life—*not* on the basis of reason, sentience, or other particular capacities—gives rise to a
*biocentric* ethics that considers not only organisms but any centered and bounded life
process as an ethical claimant.

This, in turn, makes the ethics demanded by our ontological analysis *holistic* as
well as biocentric. “Holism holds that an ethical concern for ecosystems, relationships
(for example, predator-prey), and species involves a different ethical perspective than a
central concern for the individual animals, trees, and plants that comprise the ecosystem or
species.”41 This is readily granted in regards to one particular species—*Homo sapiens*.
Very few would argue against the claim that the survival of the *entire human race* is a
very different ethical matter than the survival of individual human beings, even a
relatively large number of individuals. Yet the survival of entire non-human species—
even of entire ecosystems supporting *any number of unique species*—is regularly judged
to be secondary to human interests as base as simple comfort and economic gain. The
argument that a river or a mountain has higher ethical value than economic profit is
roundly denied.
For example, the *New York Times* has released an extensive investigation of the dangers of high-volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”:

With hydrofracking, a well can produce over a million gallons of wastewater that is often laced with highly corrosive salts, carcinogens like benzene and radioactive elements like radium, all of which can occur naturally thousands of feet underground. Other carcinogenic materials can be added to the wastewater by the chemicals used in the hydrofracking itself. The documents reveal that the wastewater, which is sometimes hauled to sewage plants not designed to treat it and then discharged into rivers that supply drinking water, contains radioactivity at levels higher than previously known, and far higher than the level that federal regulators say is safe for these treatment plants to handle. 

Yet these dangers are downplayed or even outright denied by the *Wall Street Journal*, for whom the *only* question is “whether we are serious about domestic energy production”—especially since “renewables are nowhere close to supplying enough energy, even with large subsidies, to maintain America’s standard of living.” For the *Wall Street Journal* the most important consideration is sustaining America’s wildly unsustainable standard of living. The human costs of radioactive pollution are waved away. Imagine suggesting to the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*, then, that the health of a river might trump American prosperity!

Yet this is precisely the sort of thing that a holistic ethics does suggest. In fact, not only does our analysis suggest that the health of ecosystems and the survival of species are to be considered, but that this consideration is to be extended to the health of the planet as a whole.

The holistic extension does face certain challenges, however. “First,” DesJardins writes, “it is unclear what, if any, ethical implications can be drawn from ecology.” In other words holism faces the problem of the is-ought gap: “even if there were widespread agreement on the facts, it is not clear that any ethical conclusions would obviously
Yet the is-ought problem is sidestepped when we recognize that an “ought” statement connected to the “is” of ecology is built into the analysis. That is, it is an ecological fact that all life on the planet is deeply interconnected. And the articulation of “the good” presented by Tillich, according to which growth and creation are the good toward which all life drives, entails the implication that it ought to be protected. Hence the ethical conclusion of holistic extensionism is not derived simply from certain “natural facts,” but from recognition of those facts coupled with an ethical imperative grounded in a detailed ontological analysis.

“The second major challenge focuses on the philosophical and ethical status of the relation between ecological wholes and their individual members. Such concepts as systems, relationships, and species are abstractions, seemingly removed from the real world of living, breathing individual plants and animals.” DesJardins continues, “One important criticism that follows from this points out that holistic approaches seem to subordinate the welfare of individuals—living, breathing animals, for example—to the good of the whole.” Here we must answer that this is so, at least in part. Any ethical judgment balances competing interests, and if ecological wholes are to be considered as ethical claimants, then it follows that sometimes their interests will need to win out. To use the above example, the health of the river as ecosystem, along with the health of all the myriad individuals, be they animal or human, that depend upon the health of that river for their own health, will trump the merely economic interests of energy companies, landowners, and investors. It is simply a matter of deciding between health and the good of life—intrinsic values—and economic interests—instrumental values that are only instrumental toward further instrumental values. Hence Heidegger writes that the
revealing characteristic of the challenging setting-upon “never simply comes to an end.”

All nature is commodity; means and ends blur together until there are no ends, only means toward further means. This is the reality of nihilism, in which there is no intrinsic value, no good toward which instrumental values are a means, and only a web of instrumental values. “Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering.”

Still, according to our analysis ecological relationships are not simply “abstractions” that are “removed from the real world of living, breathing plants and animals.” Ecosystems can be revealed as centered, bounded life processes. They are only abstractions when seen from below; when seen from above they are unique life processes in the relevant sense. In this way we can say that a forest breathes—certainly Lovelock and Margulis speak without hesitation of the respiration of Gaia. And Gaia, as the most inclusive, most encompassing life process we know, can be an object of love—ontologically and ethically understood—and a primary focus of ethical concern.

The ethical perspective outlined above in terms of ethical extensionism, biocentrism, and holism, is well in keeping with the extremely influential “Land Ethic” of Aldo Leopold. Leopold’s influence in American environmentalism has been called prophetic—he has been named “an American Isaiah”—and his Sand County Almanac is widely deemed “a holy book in conservation circles.” (The book is a standard piece of equipment in my own camping gear.) According to J. Baird Callicott, the environmental philosopher and Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of
North Texas, “The holism of the land ethic, more than any other feature, sets it apart from the predominant paradigm of modern moral philosophy.”

The central thesis of Leopold’s Land Ethic is simple: “In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for all his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.”

This involves obligation—obligation not only to other humans or to our societies, but to the land as such. What, then, is “land,” in Leopold’s view? The land is not simply soil. In language reminiscent of Tillich’s more poetic declarations about the power of being, Leopold writes that the land is “a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals.”

This, in turn, leads into his basic ethical statement: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

This ethical understanding centered on the idea of “integrity, stability, and beauty” is in accordance with the theological humanism of David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, who make the integrity of life a guiding principle. “The cultivated conscience is the sense that one is claimed at the core of one’s being to labor for the integrity of life,” they write, “and that, paradoxically enough, this claim is also a claim to freedom, a permission to live, and it entails a mandate for life, a mandate formulated in the imperative of responsibility.”

This cultivation requires “resources of the imagination in order to articulate the depth of conscience and the scope of human transcendence,” however, and these imaginative resources have traditionally been cultivated in religious communities “through participation in foundational myths, intellectual traditions, rituals.”

The depth of conscience is the human connection to the
depth—the ground and abyss—of being… but the imaginative resources to view Gaia as created in the image of God are in short supply in traditional Western, Christian structures and institutions. This is a fundamental reason why many today are turning away from the religion of their parents and seeking a spirituality that can provide such resources to an ecologically-, environmentally-minded conscience.

Leopold recognizes that. “No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphases, loyalties, affections, and convictions,” he writes. “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.” The theological ontology of the analysis of Parts One and Two of this dissertation provide a grounding for an understanding of our belonging to nature, of nature as an expression of divine creativity, and of our lives as bound up with an encompassing life process. Nature is the proximal ground of our being, itself grounded in being-itself, just as we are. We can be a manifestation and occurrence of the power of being—we can discover the courage to be—only because nature is so first and primordially. This drives us theoretically to an ethics of holism and biocentrism—but Klemm and Schwiker, like Aldo Leopold, recognize that a cultivated conscience requires more than theory to be ethical in regards to the integrity of life. We need an imaginative resource that allows us to see, feel, and love the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.

The image of Gaia, the image of our blue-green globe floating in the vastness of space, can be such an imaginative resource. This is an image we have had for only forty years. “They went to the Moon,” writes Steve Connor, “but ended up discovering the Earth.” We can see it, we can name it, and, understanding Gaia as a single, unitary life
process, we can feel our connection to it. In mystical participation with the proximal
ground of our being, created in the image of God just as we are, we can love it and
respect it. In the religious impulse of love directed toward unity with Gaia, and through
Gaia toward unity with the ground of all being, we can cultivate faith, grasped by the
ultimate, by “God manifest.”

**Gaia and the New Being**

In Chapter VIII we discussed Gaia as a symbol of the actualization of the second
moment of the divine life, understood in dialectical trinitarian terms as the logos. But the
logos is also the name for the Christ, who, in Tillich’s system, is understood in terms of
the New Being. We discussed the New Being in Chapter III, under the heading of “Eight
Themes Common to Panentheism,” where we showed that Tillich’s Christology is an
example of degree Christology.

The New Being is the full appearance of the essentially human—that is, the
human in its essential union with the divine—that appears under the conditions of
existence without being conquered by them. As the New Being, the Christ mediates
between God, or being-itself, and human beings, or particular manifestations of being. In
this way, the Christ represents God to human beings:

Therefore, as the Christ is expected as mediator and savior, he is not expected to
be a third reality between God and man, but as him who represents God to man.
He does not represent man to God but shows what God wants man to be. He
represents to those who live under the conditions of existence that man essentially
is and therefore ought to be under these conditions. It is inadequate and a source
of false Christianity to say that the mediator is an ontological reality beside God
and man. This could only be a half-god who at the same time is half-man. Such a
third being could neither represent God to men nor man to men. It is essential
man who represents not only man to man but God to man; for essential man, by
his very nature, represents God. He represents the original image of God
embodied in man, but he does so under the conditions of estrangement between God and man. The paradox of the Christian message is not that essential humanity includes the union of God and man. This belongs to the dialectics of the infinite and the finite. The paradox of the Christian message is that in one personal life essential manhood has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them.\textsuperscript{58}

In Tillich’s interpretation of the Christian message, it is crucial that it is in “one personal life” that “essential manhood has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them. It must be in a human life that this occurs, because for Tillich, the human being is “the creature in which the ontological elements are complete.”\textsuperscript{59}

Despite his exchange of the metaphor of “realms and dimensions” for that of “hierarchy,” then, Tillich retains enough of the anthropocentrism of the older model to keep the human being in its privileged position in the universe, a holdover from classical theism. In many ways we have done the same by making the human being the most developed locus of the divine self-understanding. On the other hand, we have insisted on expanding the realm of the completion of the ontological elements by making Gaia an inclusive entity centered in each human consciousness but also developing its awareness through the collective consciousness of all species, and most fully self-aware in the human species. That is, the human being is simultaneously displaced from its position of uniqueness and retained as the centering locus of divine awareness.

\textit{Gaia as Centered}

Let us make that argument more directly and clearly in this final chapter, for it is important that this point be understood. Slipping back into the language of hierarchy, Tillich asks, “why is man the highest being in spite of his liability to the greatest imperfection?” The answer: “The criteria are the definiteness of the center, on the one
hand, and the amount of content united by it on the other.\textsuperscript{60} But if Gaia is a single life process giving rise through co-evolution to the creatures with the most definite centers, then not only that creature but the life process of which it is a part is centered in that creature.

This is not the case in each centered entity—after all, the life process of an individual human is not centered in each of his or her cells, though each cell is itself a centered and bounded life process of its own. Here it is important to recall a passage we quoted in Chapter II under the heading, “The Dimensions and their Relation”:

The transcendence of the center over the psychological material makes the cognitive act possible, and such an act is a manifestation of spirit. We said that the personal center is not identical with any one of the psychological contents, but neither is it another element added to them; if it were this, it would be psychological material itself and not the bearer of spirit. . . . The psychological center, the subject of self-awareness, moves in the realm of higher animal life as a balanced whole, organically or spontaneously (but not mechanically) dependent on the total situation. If the dimension of the spirit dominates a life process, the psychological center offers its own contents to the unity of the personal center. This happens through deliberation and decision. In doing so it actualizes its own potentialities, but in actualizing its own potentialities, it transcends itself.\textsuperscript{61}

The psychological center itself brings its own centering act into the unity of the center along with all of the content that act unites. That is, reflexive self-awareness is crucial to fully definite centering. Hence in human self-awareness, there is, as an essential element, a manifestation of the life of a more encompassing entity. Namely, the content of the entirety of the life of Gaia is brought into self-aware unity such that the human, reflexive self-awareness is offered as one of the contents of that centering act. This is a dynamic that is not a potentiality for entities that are not capable of self-awareness. That is, a single cell has very limited awareness, and does not bring its centering to its own awareness; in the human being, however, the life process of Gaia is brought to self-
awareness. This is clearly the case, for it is in the human being that a product of the process of co-evolution has the power to articulate the process of co-evolution to itself.

Moreover, it is not simply in each individual human being that the life process of Gaia is centered—this would make Gaia schizophrenic, multiply centered. Rather, the human species as a whole is capable of self awareness. The history of philosophy is an example of the collectivity of human thought. That is, the species as a whole is capable of discussing the same questions over the course of millennia. These are deeply human questions, but they are also questions about life as such—questions of origins, meanings, values, and ends. Each individual centers that process in him- or herself, but the growth of the species as a whole is a life process all its own. It is in the process of the human species’ reflexive examination that Gaia is centered, because it is in that process that the question of the connection of human being, nature, and the divine offers its own content to the unity of the process.

All of the life processes constitutive of the life of Gaia are integrated in the single process of co-evolution. Hence, by the second criterion distinguishing “higher and lower” beings—“The criteria are the definiteness of the center, on the one hand, and the amount of content united by it on the other” —Gaia can clearly be said to be “higher” (or, more encompassing) than the human being. Again, even though human consciousness is capable of transcending the “merely biological” and involving infinite possibilities, it does so only as a product of the biological life processes of Gaia, and thus Gaia itself reaches out beyond itself in the human being. We have made this point repeatedly. But does Gaia show itself to be not only encompassing but also centered in the relevant sense, apart from the abstract analysis offered above? According to Tillich’s
ontology, “The power of the self is in its self-centeredness. Self-control is the preservation of this centeredness against disruptive tendencies, coming from the elements which constitute the center.” Here Tillich is writing of the human being, but the ontological description of the power of self-centeredness is clearly applicable to the homeostasis Gaia maintains through the process of co-evolution.

Where the human being potentially unites infinite content, Gaia does so potentially in and through the human species and individually actualizes more potentiality than humanity as a whole. The fact that Tillich does not view Gaia in this way is a major point at which our analysis, though grounded in his ontology and theology, diverges from his system. It is of the utmost importance for the analysis, however, that we diverge from Tillich specifically on the basis of Tillich’s own ontology. That is, it is not the ontology as such with which we disagree. Instead it is not to Tillich’s discredit that he failed to take account of Gaia as a single, centered, bounded life process. Tillich died in 1965, four years before Lovelock ever published even a mention of the hypothesis. Yet Tillich’s insistence that the human being is the “highest” creature does reveal a lingering remnant of the hierarchical model characteristic of classical theology.

For Tillich there is no creature—no single, centered, bounded, self-integrated life process—that unites more content than the human. For him, all creatures are basically divided into two categories, notwithstanding the metaphor of realms: the subhuman, including all non-human creatures, and the human. “Man is the creature in which all the ontological elements are complete. They are incomplete in all creatures, which (for this very reason) are called ‘subhuman,’” he writes. “Subhuman points to a different ontological level, not to a different degree of perfection.” (This is because “perfection” is
a mark of the degree to which an entity actualizes its essential potentiality—a single bacterium likely actualizes what it potentially is more completely than any human being other than that one called the Christ.) Tillich continues, “The question has to be asked whether there are superhuman beings in an ontological sense.” As possible examples of “superhuman” beings, he lists “spirits, angels, higher monads.” He then decides, “Whether such beings, if they exist, should be called ‘superhuman’ depends on one’s judgment about the ultimate significance of freedom and history.” In the end Tillich comes to the conclusion that angels, for example, are less than human in terms of freedom and the “mystery of salvation.”

Yet angels—if they existed—would be creatures beside human beings, not a globally inclusive, single, unitary life process encompassing, integrating, and manifesting in and through human beings. Thus, in a very real way, we can say that Gaia appears under the conditions of existence and—as the proximal ground of our being, “God manifest,” grounded in being-itself and uniting all terrestrial life and matter—Gaia bridges the gap between infinite depth and finite humanity. We began this section noting that Gaia and the New Being symbolized in the person of the Christ can be read in terms of the manifestation of the power of being—that is, as the second moment of the divine life, the logos. Gaia can further be seen as a bridge between the divine and the human, and as “God manifest” Gaia can be said to represent God to human beings. Gaia represents God to humanity as that which unifies the separated in self-creative growth, as the actuality of the ontological power of love and being, the drive toward which lies at the heart of all genuine religion. But can Gaia be said to conquer the conditions of existence?
Gaia and Reconciliation

For Tillich, the healing power of the New Being mediates between unconditional transcendence and concrete individuality: “healing means reuniting that which is estranged, giving a center to that which is split, overcoming the split between God and man, man and his world, man and himself. Out of this interpretation of salvation, the concept of New Being has grown.” As “God Manifest” the logos is the manifestation of the depth in structure, allowing for the actuality of concrete existence. But this existence involves being-itself taking non-being into itself, resulting in estrangement as the necessary condition of existence. The drive of love that is at the heart of all genuine religion, then, is the drive toward the reunion of that which is essentially unity but separated in existence.

Redemption, for Tillich, thus names the reconciliation of the estranged with the ground of being. This involves atonement. On the one hand, it is always God that acts in redemption: “God reveals himself to us through the mediator. God is always the one who acts, and the mediator is the one through whom he acts.” Yet, on the other hand, in atonement the human being must accept that reconciliation, which involves God’s “participation in existential estrangement and its self-destructive consequences.” This points not only to the general, panentheistic participation of God in the negativities of creaturely existence, but also to the specific self-sacrifice of essential man symbolized in the event of the Cross.

If concrete being is “God manifest” in and through finitude—that is, if God lives by virtue of the divine participation in the finite—then in the life of Gaia, God
participates in existential estrangement from two sides: from the side of Gaia and from the side of the human being. This is built into the symbol at the deepest level—it is precisely here that the symbol participates in what it points to and opens up levels of being of which we are otherwise unaware—for the concept of Nature to which the symbol correlates is a direct product of our estrangement.

In the symbol of the Cross, Tillich maintains, God’s participation in estrangement and its self-destructive consequences becomes fully manifest, fully actualized. “It is not the only actualization,” Tillich writes, “but it is the central one, the criterion of all other manifestations of God’s participation in the suffering of the world.”68 In the Cross, human destructiveness most completely turns against the ground of its own being in hubris, concupiscence, and unbelief, preferring to murder the bearer of essential humanity rather than accept his message of reconciliation. The paradox, of course, is that salvation lies precisely in the divine participation in the self-destructiveness of existential estrangement—“the suffering of God, universally and in the Christ, is the power which overcomes creaturely self-destruction by participation and transformation.”69 For Tillich, salvation principally means that “one is drawn into the power of the New Being,” and the New Being is “the state of unity between God and man, no matter how fragmentarily realized.”70 To be drawn into the participation of God in the suffering of existence is to be drawn into the essential unity of the human being with its divine ground—that is, to realize and experience, however incompletely, the reality of dual participation of the divine and the human—and this is deeply transformative. Yet it is necessary to recall that the doctrine of dual participation is complexified in a Gaian theology, so that God, nature, and human all participate in each other in various ways.
The New Being, according to Tillich, is actualized in the divine Spirit, “the actualization of power and meaning in unity.” The power of being names the creative power of the depth of being—in Chapter I we defined the power of being as (1) the ability of carrying out self-realization that all beings receive from their ground in being-itself, and (2) the vital force making possible anything that is, and it does so only through connection with nonbeing and through the structure of being. Meaning names that structure—the form of the manifestation of the creative power of being, the structure that makes a being the being that it is. Spirit, as the actualization of their unity, is always a process, the process of the divine life. Ecstatic experience is the experience of the unity of the infinite ground of being and the finite manifestation of the power of being that one is in a “transcendence of the subject-object structure.” As a reunion of the separated this is a realization of love, the aim of religion and the ground of faith. Faith is the experience of being grasped by the Spirit, “being grasped by that toward which self-transcendence aspires, the ultimate in being and meaning.” In terms of Christology, “one could say that faith is the state of being grasped by New Being as manifest in Jesus as the Christ.”

For many today, however, the symbol of Jesus as the Christ simply does not resonate, does not grasp them in ecstasy and faith. Perhaps they view Christianity as carrying too much cultural baggage; perhaps the mythological language Christianity is couched in is a barrier to transformative experience. This is the experience of many who turn away from Christianity toward various forms of ecological, new “green” religious trends. Many take the critiques of Lynn White Jr. and others like him to be ultimately damning, and find the tradition to be inherently irredeemable. For them, Gaia may
function as a new symbol of God manifest. In Gaia the divine creativity is actualized as the proximal ground of our being, as a mediating process representing the creative power of God to human beings. In Gaia, God participates in the self-destructive consequences of the conditions of existence, and the present setting-upon Gaia is entirely caused by human concupiscence, hubris, and unbelief. Yet Gaia was alive before we were born on this planet, and life on Earth will persist no matter our destructiveness—though this does not excuse us any more than violence against one’s human mother is excused by the fact that she survived it.

Ultimately, Gaia remains a unity—and remains “God manifest” as the proximal ground of organic being—despite human estrangement from and destructive exploitation of nature. Though we are aware of Nature only on the basis of our separation from it, the experience of unity with Gaia in a single life process manifesting divine creativity can grasp and transform us. The image of Gaia can function as a call to reunion with the divine life beyond estrangement—and in fact, our drive toward reunion with the ground of our being transforms not only us but the divine itself, for life is growth, creation, and self-transcendence, changing while also remaining what it was. God is transformed in the process of creation through separation and reunion just as we are, and this is the meaning and value of creation.

An awareness of Gaia as created in the image of God can and must be ingredient in Christianity in the wake of the twentieth-century’s coming to ecological awareness. A reunion with the ground of our being is more fragmentary than it otherwise could be if it fails to affect that reunion in and through a reunion with Gaia. That is, so long as we
carry our estrangement from nature into our religious drive, the transformative power of faith will be more fragmented than it otherwise would.

On the other hand, though, in the figure of Gaia we can find a symbol of the New Being effective apart from the symbol of the Christ. Gaia can act as a symbol of the essential unity of the infinite and the finite, for Gaia is God manifest on a level more encompassing than the merely human, calling us to return through Gaia to the ultimate ground of our own and its being. This return can and in fact must be pursued through recognition of our species’ ultimate unity with the life of Gaia as the centering locus of the life of Gaia. This recognition is not merely intellectual—it can grasp us in ecstatic experience. It can be a call to faith. Gaia is not only a manifestation of divine creativity; Gaia is the creative outpouring of divine love, for Gaia grows through the union of the separated, the union of the separated is the drive of love, God is love, and hence Gaia calls us to union with not only her life but with divine life and love. “God works toward the fulfillment of every creature and toward the bringing-together into the unity of his life all who are separated and disrupted.”

Unlike the Christ, Gaia cannot directly represent to human beings what they should be. But Gaia can and does represent to human beings what they must recognize themselves to be a part of—not only Gaia itself but the creative ground of being, the power of which flows through Gaia into ourselves. The unity with Gaia understood as God manifest is, panentheistically speaking, unity with God, though we must remember the dangers of pantheism, the danger of making structured, finite being into the ultimate of which it is but the manifestation. However, since Gaia is an image of God more encompassing than the individual human and centered in humanity, the symbol of Gaia
can function as a different way into the New Being—a way perhaps *more effective* than
the symbol of the Cross for many in the twenty-first century.

This vision of the New Being may no longer be specifically Christian if it does
not retain the symbol of the Cross—though it *can* retain that symbol for a fully green,
Gaian Christianity. Gaian theology does not need to be Christian in that way, however.
In that sense it can truly be called post-Christian theology, grounded in and retaining the
language of Christian theology, but in many ways working as an internal critique of
Christianity. (Of course, Tillich would claim that any good Christian theology would
function as such.) A Gaian theology thus speaks to the God of Christianity, insofar as the
God of Christianity is the ground of being, the ground of creation beyond essence and
existence, the infinite manifest in and through the finite. Yet a Gaian theology can also
work apart from Christianity insofar as Christianity depends upon the symbol of the
Christ. Gaian theology therefore calls us to union with the God of Christianity, but that
call can be heard by those who do not heed the call manifest in the life and death of Jesus
who is called the Christ.
Notes


2. Ibid., 1:277.


4. Ibid., 10.


8. Ibid., 3:95.


15. Ibid., 40-41.

16. Ibid., 71.

17. Ibid., 25.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.

21. For examples, see “Naturally Occurring Fractals” on Miquel.com for some fascinating images.

23. Ibid., 6.

24. Ibid., 9.

25. Ibid., 6.

26. Ibid., 119.


28. Ibid., 1:159.


30. Ibid., 71.


32. Ibid., 3:67

33. Ibid., 3:47.

34. Ibid., 3:52-53.


36. Ibid., 19.


39. Ibid., 3:35.

40. Ibid.


45. Ibid., 218.

47. Ibid., 17.


50. Ibid., 231.


52. Ibid., 231.

53. Ibid., 240


55. Ibid., 172.


57. Steve Connor, “Forty years since the first picture of earth from space.”


59. Ibid., 1:260.

60. Ibid., 3:36.

61. Ibid., 3:27.

62. Ibid., 3:36.


65. Ibid., 2:166.

66. Ibid., 2:170.

67. Ibid., 2:174.

68. Ibid., 2:175.

69. Ibid., 2:176.

70. Ibid., 2:179.
71. Ibid., 3:111.
72. Ibid., 3:119.
73. Ibid., 3:130.
74. Ibid., 3:131.
75. Ibid., 1:281.
CONCLUSION:
THEOLOGY OF GAIA
AND THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE

Power and physical character, meaning and objective structure, are not separated in nature. We cannot accept the word of mathematical science as the last word about nature, although we do not thereby deny that it is the first word. . . . The power of nature must be found in a sphere prior to the cleavage of our world into subjectivity and objectivity. Life originates on a level which is “deeper” than the Cartesian duality of cogito and extensio.

—Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era

Summary of the Argument

At the end of Chapter IX we suggested that Gaia might function to call people to the New Being for those to whom the symbol of the Christ no longer does. Perhaps more importantly, we suggested that this idea need not separate us from the tradition in terms of which our philosophical and theological analysis was couched—instead, our analysis may still be within the trajectory of that tradition. We will conclude the project by specifying how that may be so by pointing to Tillich’s distinction between what he calls the Protestant era and his guiding Protestant principle. Before so doing, however, it will be worthwhile to look back over whence we have come.

The Grounding Ontology and the Guiding Symbol

Throughout the project, our analysis was grounded in the philosophical, ontological, and existential theology of Paul Tillich; the bulk of the project was devoted to this grounding, which was the task of Part One. From the beginning of Part One we stressed the theme of unity: being-itself is the primordial unity that makes the separation of being into the structuring, ontological polarities of existence possible. This separation
is a product of being-itself taking non-being into itself in a dynamical, dialectical process of self-manifestation. This involves something of a paradox: being-itself cannot be thought of as subject to the polarities of the structure of being, yet being-itself manifests itself only in and through a dialectical structure involving such polarities. As such, we articulated a basic premise—as the ground of being, being-itself manifests itself in the structure of being as the power of being overcoming the threat of nonbeing—and we devoted all of Part One to unpacking this premise. We further noted that the divine life is the symbolic name for the ontological process of self-manifestation, also symbolized as creation. That is, in the divine life, being-itself self-manifests as the unity of the power of being and the nonbeing that it eternally overcomes.

Yet though the divine manifests itself in all of creation, when human reason seeks the ground of being it eventually reaches the boundary of reason—hence the ground of being is experienced as both ground and abyss. On the other hand, we saw that in reason the human mind is able to grasp the structure of being, and thus the human being can shape his or her world, though always incompletely. This is so because human reason is always already an instance of structured being in its self-relation. The structure of reason and the structure of being are alike logos. Moreover, the ability of human reason to grasp and shape reality depends upon knowing, which is a sort of partial and provisional re-union of subjective and objective logos. That is, as elements of the structured being that is the self-manifestation of being-itself, both subject and object are primordially and essentially united. Again, though, the ability for the subject to grasp the object depends upon separation. Hence, knowing, in this view, is a re-union of that which is essentially one but separated as the condition of the possibility of existence, since being-itself
manifests itself through a dialectic process of the power of being eternally overcoming nonbeing in structured being.

The self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being, furthermore, is to be understood in terms of self-affirmation. Here the provision must be re-emphasized: all such language is symbolic at best, expressing analogously an infinite ontological reality in terms borrowed from experience. Being-itself is the ground and abyss of being, according to Tillich—being-itself is not a “self.” But the dynamic of the power of being overcoming nonbeing is instantiated in our human being as courageous self-affirmation: our self-affirmation is an instance of the power of being overcoming nonbeing. In the existential courage to be we accept our participation in the divine life, and the participation of the divine in our life, even (or especially) in our finitude. This is of the utmost existential importance because it is in human beings that the question of the meaning of being can be asked.

Creation, life, growth—these are the vehicles and products of both divine and existential self-affirmation. Life originates not only out of the self-transcendence of the divine life, but proximally and most directly out of the dynamism and freedom of existence, the condition for the possibility of which is the dual participation of the divine life and finite being. This means, again, that in the self-manifestation of being-itself in structured being, the power of being and nonbeing are mixed. All that is participates in the divine life as an instance of the power of being overcoming nonbeing in the process of outgoing that is creation. Thus, all that is, is limited. That which exists stands out of nonbeing and potential (or essential) being—it stands out of potential being as actual, and out of nonbeing as extant. More, finite being is limited both by absolute and relative
nonbeing—it is limited by absolute nonbeing because it comes out of nonbeing in birth and goes into nonbeing in death, and it is limited by relative nonbeing insofar as it is the thing that is it and not other. Yet it is crucial to keep in mind that all that is, is an instance of the power of being overcoming nonbeing.

Thus we named this dynamic interplay of the infinite and the finite in creation “dual participation.” Each of us, every finite being, manifests creation. The divine lives in and through the finite; the finite is as an instance of the power of being overcoming nonbeing; being-itself manifests in, through, and to the finite as the infinite drive of the finite beyond its own limits. (This, we saw, is the ontological meaning of Nietzsche’s basic religious symbol, the will to power.) Thus the process of the self-manifestation of being-itself is symbolized as the divine life, for the ontological structure of creation is analogous to the dialectical process of life as such. This structure unfolds in three moments—self-identity, self-alteration, and return—and is characterized by Tillich as a movement out ahead of itself. In its utmost extension, this process returns to itself in and through reflexive self-awareness, for in self-awareness the centering function makes itself one of the functions that are centered.

This connects the human being to the universal process of life both organically and consciously, and allows us to affirm that the human being is the scene of the self-awareness of being. By bringing our self-awareness into our own process of projection-out-ahead-of-ourselves, human beings can and do transcend our finitude (at least fragmentarily) while remaining finite. The principle of growth, Tillich maintains, is self-alteration that maintains self-identity, according to the ontological elements of dynamics and form. Thus, human self-transcendence brings together the universal process of life
and human awareness—in the human being creation becomes self-aware. This is a central implication of Tillich’s doctrine of the Trinity, adapted from Hegel. In Tillich’s theology, the dialectical process of the self-manifestation of being-itself is correlated to the symbol of the Trinity and is analogous to the universal process of life: the Godhead is the ground and abyss of being, the depth dimension of pure self-identity; the Logos is the structure of being, the process of out-going self-alteration in creation; the Spirit is the unity of ground and structure, the principle of return in and through the self-transcendence of finite being in ecstatic union with its ground, the experience of the sacred.

The analogy of the dialectical process of the self-manifestation of being-itself—symbolically named the divine life—with the universal process of life as such gives the fullest content to the idea of dual participation. This content can be expressed both ontologically and symbolically. Ontologically, or conceptually, we can say that in dual participation finite being participates in the self-manifestation of being-itself precisely because being-itself participates in finite being as its generating and empowering ground, as the power of being in all that has being. Symbolically, or religiously, we can say that in dual participation the divine life participates in every finite being as the sustaining power of creation, while finite life participates in the divine life as a particular occurrence of creation. Moreover, just as the infinite potentiality for self-transcendence in the finite (human being) generates in finite being an awareness of potential infinity bound by actual finitude, the participation of the divine in creation gives rise to the human awareness of the presence of the sacred even in the condition of estrangement. Both of these are experienced as anxiety.
The import of dual participation is that it is in and through dual participation that both finite being and the living God have life. It is because Tillich speaks in terms of dual participation, furthermore, that we were able to categorize his theology as panentheistic. Tillich rejects both classical theism and pantheism with what we have named dual participation: classical theism is rejected because it separates the divine from creation; pantheism is rejected because it reduces the infinite ground of being to the finite totality of beings. This is part and parcel of Tillich’s dynamic conception of God as a living God, manifesting in, through, and to creation.

Finally, on the basis of this analysis we were able to develop the fundamental structure of a principle of value, an insight that would ground our discussion of the ethical import of the symbol of Gaia in Part Three. We saw that when we view all life ontologically, as a universal phenomenon and as an expression of divine creativity, the common modern, anthropocentric view that human beings are the most important bearers of moral value cannot be maintained. All life tends toward its own good, and as an instance of the divine life, the good of any life is a good as such—an example of the power of being overcoming nonbeing in growth. This led us to a position whereby we were able to affirm both the intrinsic value of all life and grades of value corresponding to grades of being, characterized by the definiteness of a being’s center and the degree of realms of being that a being unites.

The Concept of Nature

In Part Two we developed the concept of Nature, beginning with what we could discern from Tillich’s scattered comments on the subject. Tillich’s view of nature takes
root between two insights: (1) in unlocking the secrets of the power of creation, humanity’s destructive (or demonic) tendencies are now capable of threatening terrestrial life on an unprecedented scale; (2) nature is a living (not mechanistic) expression of the divine, participating in the drama of Fall and salvation and potentially revelatory and sacramental in all its permutations. A key acknowledgement of Tillich’s system as it regards nature is that life is a universal phenomenon—all entities, from the smallest atom through all organic life to the most distant star share the ontological structure characteristic of life. Moreover, the development from the inorganic to the organic is a process, since the potential for the organic is present in the inorganic.

Because all life processes are characterized by the ontological dialectical structure of centering, growth, and return, life gives rise to gestalten in all realms of being. That is, the centering process gives rise to “self-related, self-preserving, self-increasing, self-continuing” living wholes that go out beyond themselves to become what they are-not-yet while remaining what they are.¹ These gestalts are themselves bounded collections of processes, each with their own space and time. Tillich’s emphasis on gestalts—rather than on, for example, organisms or people—allowed us to connect his views on nature with the deep ecology of Arne Næss, whose work emphasized “gestalt-thinking” as a corrective to anthropocentrism. In deep ecology, gestalts are constituted by their relations—they are both independent, individual entities or processes and relationally dependant—and in every gestalt whole and part are internally related. This further linked Tillich to deep ecology, since his rejection of ontological hierarchy in favor of the model of dimension and realm stresses the multidimensional, relational unity of life.
Another important element of Tillich’s understanding of nature is that it involves a rejection not only of classical theism but also of religious naturalism in the form of pantheism. Thus Tillich’s theology takes the form of a middle way between classical theism and pantheism: panentheism. This is a direct implication of the idea of dual participation, and it led us to complexify the idea of dual participation by adding the third term of nature (in the sense of the non-human wild that is discovered through existential estrangement). That is, it is not only the case that the human life and the divine life participate in each other, but the divine life, the human life, and the life process of nature as such interpenetrate in multifaceted ways.

It is vital to stress, however, that both the human being and nature remain finite; thus the participation of the divine on one side and the human being and nature on the other is marked by the relation of infinite and finite. That is, God (or being-itself) is absolute, while both nature and human being are contingent. A key implication of the infinite/finite relation that marks the complex, reciprocal participation of the divine, human, and nature is that while human being and nature transcend each other relatively, the divine transcends human being and nature alike absolutely. Being-itself is the ground and depth of the being of both human being and nature. Nature transcends both the individual human and the human species as their proximal, more encompassing ground; human being transcends nature in the ability to grasp and shape reality in freedom.

Having reviewed Tillich’s (often implicit) understanding of nature, we turned to a central task of the project: developing an ontological concept of Nature. The very term, “nature,” is marked by ambiguity, and in fact it turns out that the ambiguity is inherent to the concept, and that it is a productive ambiguity. Unpacking that ambiguity turned on
two basic arguments. First, the “average-everyday” understanding of nature as the mechanistic, non-human wild is a product of the scientific revolution. Second, the concept arises directly from the subject-object structure of experience, itself a product of estrangement, and as such the concept reveals estrangement at its very core. This led us to define Nature as that of which we are a part even as it is that from which we are apart.

Central to our average-everyday use of the term is the separation of and contrast between the human and the non-human. Pre-critically, nature is conceived of as absent the characteristically and essentially human—this is its distinguishing characteristic, and this is what has led to the early scientific view that nature is essentially calculable (and available to human mastery) precisely because it is deterministic and mindless. Of equal importance is the notion that nature is not only the not-human but it is also the not-divine—hence the common sense of the term “supernatural.” Thus, in the very origins of the term we found two distinctions: the natural/artifice distinction and the natural/supernatural distinction. This common understanding was solidified in and through the rise of science, which took the separation of the human and divine from nature to its furthest extreme in the mechanistic view of nature, according to which mind, soul, and freedom are essentially human and divine, and thus that which is not-human and not-divine is essentially matter in deterministically unfolding motion.

It is at this point that we turned to Heidegger’s essays on technology and science. The reason for this move was that to understand nature—a slippery and ambiguous concept in its everyday usage—a productive strategy is to understand that from which we distinguish nature. As we have seen, the most basic characteristic of our pre-critical understanding of nature is its distinction from human artifice: technology. To Heidegger,
technology is not simply the manufacture and use of tools. (This is especially important since it has been shown that not only the higher primates but even crows are capable of the manufacture and use of tools—long pridefully held to be the distinguishing characteristic of the human intellect.) Instead, the essence of technology is that it encompasses the whole web of concerns to which the manufacture and use of tools belongs, and that it puts all of nature at its disposal.

According to Heidegger, means and ends belong within a way of occupying the world dominated by cause-and-effect thinking. As occupants of the world, we find ourselves together with other things, both those that have their efficient cause in themselves (natural things) and those that have their efficient cause in another being (artificial things). Both natural growth and artifice are modes of beings coming out of nonbeing and into being—thus the distinction between nature and artifice, on an immediate level, names an ontological phenomenon. That is, the distinction points to the fact that the efficient cause is different between products of artifice and naturally growing or occurring things. (Of course this is complicated, as we note throughout, by the fact that the human being is both a product of natural “bursting-forth” and an agent of bringing artificial things into being.)

The traditional, Greek sense of *techné* is, for Heidegger, different in an important respect from the dominating force of modern technology, however. Both are products of means-ends calculations caught up in a web of particularly human concerns, but with the scientific revolution a significant shift took place: nature herself came to be seen as essentially calculable. Scientific calculation, put to work by the means-ends, cause-effect calculation of the technological attitude, unleashed a new force in the world. The
bringing-forth of technology set upon and challenged the bringing-forth of nature with the aim of utter and total control. Every bringing-forth was to be brought within the means-ends calculation. Even the human being itself became subject to this challenge, became objectified. Furthermore, Heidegger claims, in hypostatizing the subject-object separation, the primordial unity of both is obscured, allowing for the particularly modern form of alienation according to which the subject is objectified.

This analysis was crucial to our development of the concept of Nature, for experience, knowledge, and even existence are possible only through separation of self and world, subject and object. This basic separation is directly instantiated in the Man-Nature contrast, which is a way of occupying the self-world contrast given content by the distinction between physis and techné. The Man-Nature contrast is further calcified by the mechanistic view of nature characteristic of modern science and the challenging setting-upon characteristic of modern technology. That calcification in turn makes the split between Man and Nature basic, original, and the primordial unity of human being and nature that grounds the separation is lost. Yet the primordial unity of self and world, subject and object, being and being, is the ground and abyss of being, being-itself. Thus while the concept of Nature is a product of estrangement, taken to its furthest extreme in the technological mode of being it gives rise to utter alienation and, finally, nihilism.

With the concept of Nature as that of which we are a part and that from which we are apart given content and existential import, we turned to consider Nature as a religious idea. As we pointed out above, a religious idea of Nature grounded in a Tillichian ontology cannot become strict naturalism, insofar as strict naturalism tends to entail reductionism. We must always bear in mind that in the grounding ontology nature is a
finite expression of divine creativity, grounded in and not interchangeable with being-itself. But neither can nature be viewed purely mechanistically, as utterly determined and free of intrinsic value.

It became important, therefore, to note that Tillich correlates the concept of \textit{estrangement}—which was central to our articulation of the concept of Nature—with the religious symbol of \textit{sin}. Not only \textit{are} we separated from the ground of our being, but we \textit{turn away} from it toward finite objects, and especially toward the subject (ourselves), over and above all objects. This is most emphatically expressed in the challenging setting-upon characteristic of modern technology, according to which the proximal and encompassing source of our organic being is made subordinate to purely material human concerns. Thus our contemporary ecological crisis can be seen as a product of sin in the relevant sense—not in the sense that it is disobedience to a positive law, but in the sense that it is a direct result of turning away from the ground of our being, as it flows through and is expressed in nature, toward ourselves and our economic concerns as the sole source of value.

However, since faith as Tillich understands it is identical with the root of love—the desire for the reunion of that which is separated—the goal of religion is not simply an awareness of the union of human and divine, but of human, divine, and nature. Moreover, the reunion of subject and object—separated in the process of creation, rendering consciousness possible—is the knowledge of truth. Truth is the incomplete unity of subject and object, according to Tillich’s view, and thus an awareness of truth fulfills the desire of faith, at least partially. Thus we concluded that, as the natural world encompasses and grounds other beings as well as one’s own being, resolving that union is
ingredient in the ultimate desire of faith. Furthermore, since the divine self-manifestation proceeds by unfolding *through* nature *into and through* consciousness, in the human awareness of belonging to our ground both the self-awareness of the divine and the self-awareness of nature are manifest.

**The Symbolic Name, Gaia**

With our concept of Nature fleshed out, we turned to the task of correlating that concept to the symbolic name of Gaia. This is, of course, an ages-old religious symbol, and any enduring religious symbol names a response to a deep and enduring existential question, in Tillich’s view. On the other hand, this is a *revitalized* symbol, in that its usage no longer names the mother of the gods of Olympus and the Titans. Since Lovelock, Gaia names a superorganism composed of all terrestrial life coupled with the air, water, stone, etc., in a life process of co-evolution giving rise to climactic and atmospheric homeostasis. As a life process, the Gaian process of co-evolution partakes of the ontological structure of life as Tillich described it, involving the three moments of self-identity, self-alteration, and self-transcendence in a centered movement ahead.

Gaia is not simply a superorganism, however—Gaia *as a name* is a symbol, and we saw that the symbolic name coheres to the six characteristics of a symbol as Tillich lists them. With the articulation of the name of Gaia in its function as a symbol, though, comes the warning that the symbol cannot be confused with that which it symbolizes. That is, Gaia symbolizes the underlying unity of all organic life as grounded in being-itself, but the unity of life is more encompassing than the terrestrial. Further, in no case should Gaia be made the name of the ultimate, for Gaia, like the human being to whom...
she gives life, is a finite expression of divine creativity. On the other hand, Gaia can be seen as created in the image for just the same reason. In any case, the concept to which the symbolic name of Gaia was correlated was the ontological concept of Nature understood in terms of unity as that of which we are a part and from which we are apart. Gaia is that from which we are apart in estrangement even while we are primordially a part of her life in our organic, conscious, and even spiritual being. When we transcend nature in freedom we do so as a part of living nature, not as separated from mechanistic, determined materiality. Thus the name of Gaia correlates to the fundamental ambiguity at the core of the concept of Nature, and expresses the estrangement that underlies the concept and gives rise to the religious drive toward reunion expressed in the contemporary greening of religion.

This understanding of the drive at the core of the green religious impulse allowed us to consider some important religious and moral implications of the correlation of Nature and Gaia through the lens of existential estrangement. Here we noted that estrangement, to Tillich, involves two related movements: the turn away and the turn back toward. The turn away involves turning away from the infinite ground of being toward the finite: our finite selves and the finite contents of our world. The turn back toward involves the impulse for our return to the ground of our being in re-union. This desire for re-union beyond separation Tillich calls the root of love, and the desire of love is the ground of religion. Hence, the green religious impulse incorporates the double motion of existential estrangement with a recognition that one belongs to the earth in scientific terms. Meanwhile, science itself expresses the double motion insofar as the challenging drive to master nature is a turn away from Gaia, while the insights of deep
ecology and Gaia theory represent a turn back toward our belonging to nature. Thus, the religious challenge becomes recognizing the proximal ground of our organic being—to which we belong in *all* aspects of our being—as an expression of the divine life, without making Gaia into an idol.

Above, we mentioned that the desire of love is the ground of religion. For Tillich, love is the expression, not the negation, of power, as power is manifest in growth. Again, this brings us back to the theory of Gaia as superorganism, for as Lynn Margulis argues, Gaia grows precisely through the re-union of the separated, a process she names symbiogenesis. Thus we were able to show that the co-evolutionary process of all life on the planet—Gaia—is a manifestation of the basic ontological forces of love, power, and justice. The life of Gaia manifests the divine life as an expression of divine creativity through the force of love.

This was a key insight, for we further saw that on a number of points Tillich’s ontology, when applied to the development of the concept of Nature as correlated to the symbolic name of Gaia, bears deep *ethical* implications. In particular, the religious and moral import of Gaian theology involves ethical holism and extensionism. In extensionism, the non-human is given ethical status; in holism not only individual organisms but also collectives of relevant types are given ethical status. Thus we were able to extend ethical consideration not only to non-human organisms but also to species and even to ecosystems such as mountains and rivers—and we were able to do so grounded in a detailed ontological analysis. In Aldo Leopold’s terms, we developed an ontologically grounded theological perspective that led us to see *the land* as possessed of an ethical claim. To cultivate a sense for that claim, however, we require resources of the
imagination. Such resources are most often expressed in religious symbols. The image of Gaia—both a religious symbolic name and an ecologically recognizable entity—is just such an imaginative resource.

Finally, we considered the historical fact that for many people today—especially those most in tune with the green religious impulse—the image of the Christ has lost its transformative power as a symbol of the New Being. This is the experience of many, if not most, who seek green religious expressions.* For these individuals, Gaia may function as a powerful symbol of “God manifest,” a locution that implicitly warns against the idolatrous tendency to make Gaia the ultimate and absolute. In Gaia, the divine creativity is manifest as the proximal ground of organic being, and as such Gaia mediates between God and humans—a key function of the Christ. In Gaia, the divine participates in existence, yet Gaia remains a grounding unity despite being finite. As Nature, Gaia expresses estrangement while simultaneously revealing the primordial unity grounding the structure marked by separation. The revelation of Gaia in these terms can indeed be deeply transformative. This awareness must be a part of any environmentally responsible Christianity. But more, in the figure of Gaia we can find a symbol of the New Being that can effect existential transformation where the figure of the Christ has lost this power.

Thus the question remains to be asked: Does such a theology leave the Christ behind … and with the Christ, Christianity? It need not—we can have both Gaia and the Christ, and this is of supreme importance to those who seek to articulate a deeply

* For an extended discussion of this point, see Bron Taylor’s Dark Green Religion. Taylor examines a wide variety of individuals and groups that fall under the umbrella of “nature religion” or “green religion.” Very few of them adhere to any sort of traditional Christianity, and most of them utterly reject the Christian tradition as entirely antithetical to an enlightened environmentalism. Whether or not they are correct in this view is not the point. The point is that for these people, the experience of the symbol of the Christ is not an experience of salvation but of violence. For them, the symbol of the Christ no longer carries transformative power, but the symbolic name of Gaia might.
ecological, environmentally responsible Christian faith. Yet where the Christ no longer transforms, or where the symbol of the Christ is too encumbered by the Western history of increasing dominion over nature, this theology can become post-Christian without losing its philosophical or religious force. Interestingly, though, this sort of thinking remains paradigmatically Protestant, as Tillich understands Protestantism, and as Protestant it remains fully grounded in Christianity as one possible continuation of that tradition.

**The Protestant Principle and the Continuation of Tradition**

For Tillich, it is important to separate the Protestant era—which may or may not be ending—from the Protestant principle. “Protestantism as a principle is eternal and a permanent criterion of everything temporal,” Tillich writes. “Protestantism as the characteristic of a historical period is temporal and subjected to the eternal Protestant principle.” Indeed, the end of the Protestant era, for Tillich, in no way signals the end of Protestantism as such:

On the contrary, it may be the way in which the Protestant principle must affirm itself in the present situation. The end of the Protestant era is not the return to the Catholic era and not even, although much more so, the return to early Christianity; nor is it the step to a new form of secularism . . . for Christianity is final only in so far as it has the power of criticizing and transforming each of its historical manifestations; and just this power is the Protestant principle. If the problem is raised of Protestantism as protest and creation, a large group of questions immediately appear, all of them insufficiently answered in historical Protestantism and all of them driving toward radical transformations. . . . The sharp distinction between the principle and the actuality of Protestantism leads to the following question: By the power of what reality does the Protestant principle exercise its criticism? . . . In other words: How can a spiritual Gestalt live if its principle is the protest against itself? . . . The answer is: In the power of the New Being that is manifest in Jesus as the Christ. Here the Protestant protest comes to an end. Here is the bedrock on which it stands and which is not subjected to criticism.
At the end of Chapter IX, however, we suggested two things. First, that Gaia may function as a symbol of the New Being where the symbol of the Christ does not. That the symbol of the Christ may fall away as a meaningful transformative symbol is entirely in keeping with what Tillich says about symbols in general: they spring up and pass on.

Whether or not the symbol of the Christ works in this time—or in any time—need not be argued; that is an existential point to be decided in the experience of each individual and each culture. The second point, though, does speak directly to our current topic: that a theology that makes Gaia a symbol of the New Being remains within the trajectory of the tradition.

If this second point is true, then we should be able to show that Tillich’s theology can make room for just such a move—and indeed we can show precisely that, utilizing his doctrine of the Protestant principle. Where the churches fail to satisfactorily answer the challenge of the ecological crisis, it is because they have not dealt with the implications of a living earth, created in the image of the living God. Thus a theology that brings these implications to the fore grounded in an analysis of Christian symbols functions as an internal critique of that failure—that is, through the Protestant principle in action.

To understand Tillich’s idea of the Protestant principle we need a (brief) bit of background in Tillich’s theology of culture. First and foremost, according to Tillich, “Religion is the substance of culture, culture is the expression of religion.” As we have seen, for Tillich, all life and all creation is an expression of the divine depth, and all cultural creation is an expression of a particular culture’s mode of relation to that ground. Culture expresses religion as the drive to manifest our essential unity with the ground of
being in art, science, and all the products of culture, through our own creation, transcending natural necessity. This, in turn, leads Tillich to distinguish between cultures of theonomy, heteronomy, and autonomy. A culture of theonomy is one in which “the ultimate meaning of existence shines through all finite forms of thought and action.” A heteronomous culture is a product of the “attempt of a religion to dominate autonomous cultural creativity from the outside.” This is in sharp contrast with a culture of self-complacent autonomy, which “cuts the ties of a civilization with its ultimate ground and aim.” The Protestant principle, then, “demands a self-transcending autonomy, or theonomy.”

Along with his taxonomy of cultures, Tillich presents two related ideas. The first we have discussed in passing: the demonic, understood as the destructive exercise of human freedom and the principle of destruction resulting from the element of nonbeing in all being. The second is more relevant to the current discussion: the kairos, the “fullness of time,” or the right time. In Chapter IX we argued that the time is right for revitalizing and reimagining of the symbol of Gaia—the idea is ages-old, but its content today is a product of science as well as existential theology and philosophy. Moreover, the very science that has led to our ability to actualize our drive to master nature has also given us the content of the symbol by which we express our unity with nature. Thus the symbol is both ancient and new, it has grown organically, and in the increasing drive of the green religious impulse the ground is prepared for the reception of this symbol.

Tillich maintains that the current age has a kairos of its own, “a kairos that is now emerging in the crises and catastrophes of our day.” In any kairos, the absolute appears in the relative “as judgment and creation.” In our time there are numerous critiques that
connect the estrangement of the human from nature with the historical set of ideas expressed in the scientific revolution. These critiques find the estrangement of the human being from the nature of which it is a part to be expressed both in Christian myth and in the mechanistic view of nature characteristic of the scientific revolution. That view makes nature a thing to be dominated, mastered, and made into no more than resources, and it makes the human being the sole locus of value even as it makes the subject into an object. In the figure of Gaia as an expression of the divine, on the other hand, the absolute appears in the relative as judgment, and this is a crisis for traditional and common ways of thought in a technological society and the churches that serve it.

The question then becomes: Is our age open to that judgment? In the rise of the environmental and sustainability movements, in the drive toward the greening of religion, we see the first signs of this openness. Yet this openness remains subject to disruption by the modern emphasis upon individual autonomy:

What has destroyed primitive theonomy? The answer is the always present, always driving, always restless principle of “autonomy.” Just as theonomy does not mean a situation in which God gives laws, so autonomy does not mean lawlessness. It means the acceptance of the structures and laws of reality as they are present in human mind and in its structures and laws. Autonomy means obedience to reason . . . It replaces mystical nature with rational nature . . . It constitutes communities on the basis of purpose, and morality on the basis of individual perfection. It analyzes everything in order to put it together rationally. It makes religion a matter of personal decision and makes the inner life of the individual dependent upon itself . . . The power of scientific and technical needs, in war and in industry and in agriculture; the rationalizing energy inherent in the centralization of religion and government . . . all of these forces are at work in every moment, and they try to break the bonds of the theonomous situation.9

When the drive for rationalistic autonomy—which has arguably never been as strong as it has become in the current era—pushes against the appearance of the absolute as unity and the call of love, a crisis situation is the result. This dynamic is perfectly encapsulated in
the Wall Street Journal’s claim regarding hydraulic fracturing that the relevant question is “whether we are serious about domestic energy production,” answering that “renewables are nowhere close to supplying enough energy, even with large subsidies, to maintain America’s standard of living.” Here is only one contemporary example of the technological attitude in industry and economics pushing against the demand of the unconditional as it expresses itself in and through Gaia.

Thus the crisis for our time is a kairos in the relevant sense—the time is right for a judgment of our self-complacent autonomy to be heard, and that judgment is a crisis and a potential turning point. Hence, Tillich writes, the kairos “as decisive for our present situation, is the coming of a new theonomy on the soil of a secularized and emptied autonomous culture.” This secularized era began along with the Protestant era with the rise of the modern nation-state system and the relegation of faith to the status of personal decision and intellectual assent, and with the rise of science the locus of value was shifted entirely to the human while nature was de-sacralized. Technological setting-upon has changed our world, and this change has culminated in an emptied, secularized culture: “Autonomous culture is secularized to the degree to which it has lost its ultimate reference, its center of meaning, its spiritual substance.” It is for just this reason that the modern age has led to the rise of the very nihilism that Nietzsche prophesied. And it is precisely the culture of empty autonomy and nihilism, in which the only value is ever-increasing consumption, in which every bursting-forth is challenged to become a means to a never ending cycle of further means, which has led to this crisis. As a culture we are pressed to articulate the value of nature, but the only language of value we as a culture share is the language of economy, production, and subjective taste.
Again, though, the call to articulate this value is not the call to impose an alien law upon our culture. Rather, it is a matter of our need to recognize our essential belonging to nature as an expression of the divine:

Autonomy asserts that man as the bearer of universal reason is the source and measure of culture and religion—that he is his own law. Heteronomy asserts that man, being unable to act according to universal reason, must be subjected to a law, strange and superior to him. Theonomy asserts that the superior law is, at the same time, the innermost law of man himself, rooted in the divine ground which is man’s own ground: the law of life transcends man, although it is, at the same time, his own.¹³

The law of life, of course, is that of love, power, and justice, the drive of creation out beyond itself and back to its ground. The human being partakes of and participates in that law as an instance of its fecundity, and human creations are an expression of that law. Thus to follow the law of theonomy is to sacrifice unqualified autonomy; and this is in many ways antithetical to the modern project. Ironically, however, an insistence on unrestrained autonomy is precisely the root of the modern crisis of meaning, nihilism: “A psychological type has been created, in Europe as well as in America, which is powerful and empty at the same time.”¹⁴ On the other hand, again ironically, submission to the law of life gives rise to true freedom, the freedom to create value as an expression of life and love. Thus the current ecological crisis—bound together as it is with crises of economic and social justice—becomes simultaneously an ethical and a religious, spiritual challenge: the challenge to express the law of love in our daily, economic, political, and religious lives.

Tillich, then, turns to seek a solution to ethical problems in a time of kairos—“in a historical period, characterized by a radical and revolutionary transformation of one historical era into another one.”¹⁵ Such a solution, according to Tillich, would require a
very specific quality: “There must be something immovable in the ethical principle, the
criterion and standard of all ethical change. And there must be a power of change within
the ethical principle itself; and both must be united.”16 Because this demand requires that
any principle capable of being a criterion of ethics in a changing world must contain the
power of change, Tillich’s solution to the problem of ethical continuity in a changing
world is clearly connected to his idea of the Protestant principle.

The substance of what Tillich calls rationalistic-progressive ethics—which are
characteristic of the Western industrial and capitalist culture that gave rise to the current
ecological crisis—is not sufficient to the challenge. Rationalistic-progressive ethics are
part of a paradigmatically modern type of “life and thought” representing a particular
solution to a particular problem of ethics in a particular time of historical change.17 This
solution became authoritative in a past changing world, one in which “strong common
belief and conventional morals maintained by the leading groups of society” were falling
away, when appeal to Church and tradition was being replaced by appeal to reason and
science.

The solution is the most natural one for an undisturbed bourgeois thought and is
still deeply rooted in the subconscious of contemporary philosophers as well as laymen. There are, according to this point of view, some eternal principles, the
natural law of morals—but without the supra-natural sanction claimed for it in the
Catholic system. These principles, as embodied in the Bill of rights, are like stars
which always remain far remote from ever human realization but which, like
stars, show the direction in which mankind must go. . . . But the principles on
which the progressive-rationalistic solution is based represent a special pattern, a
special type of freedom and equality, that of the later ancient or that of the modern
bourgeois period. They do not represent principles comprehensive enough to
embrace all periods and creative enough to bring new embodiments of
themselves. They are not eternal enough to be ultimate principles and not
temporal enough to fit a changing world.18
That this is the case is clearly illustrated by our contemporary difficulty in expressing the value of nature in terms coherent with the idea that the function of civil government is to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens.

If human freedom and equality, understood in terms of the autonomous individual, cannot offer principles that contain the power of their own change, what principle does Tillich espouse? Tillich’s solution is the principle of love:

Love, agape, offers a principle of ethics which maintains an eternal, unchangeable element but makes its realization dependant on continuous acts of a creative intuition. . . . You can express it as a law, you can say as Jesus and the apostles did: “Thou shalt love”; indicating that the ultimate principle of ethics, which, on the one hand, is an unconditional command, is, on the other hand, the power of breaking through all commands. And just this ambiguous character of love enables it to be the solution of the question of ethics in a changing world. If you take the principles of natural law as embodied in the Bill of Rights, you will find that, taken as the concrete embodiment of the principle of love in a special situation, they are great and true and powerful; they represent love by establishing freedom and equal rights against willfulness and suppression and against the destruction of human beings. But taken as eternal laws and applied legalistically to different situations, for instance, to the early Middle Ages or the decay and transformation of economic capitalism, these principles become bad ideologies used for the maintenance of decaying institutions and powers. . . . Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing its eternity and dignity and unconditional validity.19

In naming love as the basic ethical principle, Tillich brings together the ontological power of unity and the religious drive toward reunion with that basic ethical principle.

Moreover, since Gaia grows by and organically manifests the power of love, our guiding religious symbol can function as an imaginative resource calling us to recognition of our religious and ethical responsibility to nature.
Notes

3. Ibid., xxii-xxiii
4. Ibid., xvii.
5. Ibid., xvi.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 15.
8. Ibid., 38.
9. Ibid., 44-45.
12. Ibid., 58.
13. Ibid., 57.
14. Ibid., 73.
15. Ibid., 150.
16. Ibid., 154.
17. Ibid., 151.
18. Ibid., 153.
19. Ibid., 154-55.
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