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PHAINOMENA

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GNOSIS AND *PISTIS* IN TILlich'S AND KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

Mindaugas BRIEDIS

Escuela de Comunicación, Universidad Panamericana, Augusto Rodin 498,
Ciudad de México, 03920, México | Institute of Humanities, Mykolas Romeris
University, Ateities 20, Vilnius, 08303, Lithuania

mbriedis@up.edu.mx | mbriedis@mruni.eu

Abstract

The article analyzes and compares the philosophical theology of Kierkegaard and Tillich. They are usually represented as exponents of the same (existentialist-Protestant) tradition, but a different perception of the main questions and possibilities for philosophical theology to answer them guides these philosophers to radically different conclusions regarding the philosophy of religion. A closer look at how they understand faith (*pistis*) unlocks new possibilities to interpret the ideas of Kierkegaard

and Tillich rather than to accept “chrestomathic” analyses. Tillich’s implicit loyalty to Platonic and Hegelian ideas subordinates the existential aspects of his system to answers, which can be described as a “gnostic” understanding of faith and knowledge. This violates the limits for theoretical knowledge set by Kierkegaard. Such a Tillichian ontological loyalty explains that an ontological search is implicated in every religious experience. This basic presupposition of interaction with the sacred for Tillich lets us view Kierkegaard’s famous interpretation of biblical myths critically, and to argue that these stories do not mean that the only possible faith is “blind” faith. This opens a path for Tillich to rationalize every aspect of Christianity and to talk about “true God,” God beyond the gods of actual religions.

Keywords: Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard, faith, knowledge, religious experience, theology.

Gnosis in pistis v Tillichovi in Kierkegaardovi filozofski teologiji

Povzetek

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Članek analizira in primerja filozofsko teologijo pri Kierkegaardu in Tillichu. Navadno oba razumemo kot predstavnika iste (eksistencialistično-protestantske) tradicije, a različno dojetje poglavitnih vprašanj in možnosti, da filozofska teologija odgovori nanje, je oba misleca vodilo k radikalno drugačnim zaključkom glede filozofije religije. Natančnejši vpogled v to, kako razumeta vero (*pistis*), razpira nove možnosti interpretacije Kierkegaardovih in Tillichovih idej, namesto da bi preprosto sprejeli »hrestomatične« analize. Tillichova implicitna zvestoba platonskim in heglovskim idejam eksistencialne vidike njegovega sistema podreja odgovorom, ki jih je mogoče opisati kot »gnostično« razumevanje vere in védenja. To prekoračuje meje teoretskega védenja, kakor jih je načrtoval Kierkegaard. Takšna Tillichova ontološka zvestoba pomeni, da sleherni religiozno izkustvo vključuje ontološko iskanje. Po Tillichu tovrstna temeljna predpostavka interakcije s svetim omogoča kritičen pogled na Kierkegaardovo znamenito interpretacijo bibličnih mitov in omogoča zagovor mnenja, da »slepa« vera ni edina možnost njihovega dojetja. S tem se Tillichu odpre pot k racionalizaciji slehernega vidika krščanstva in h govoru o »resničnem bogu«, bogu onkraj bogov dejanskih religij.

Ključne besede: Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard, vera, védenje, religiozno izkustvo, teologija.

Systematic and philosophical theology

Paul Tillich is known as the most influential creator of systematic theology of the last century. However, “system” is not simply a feature of Tillich’s philosophizing or a way of presenting it; we cannot say that this philosophical theology is such and such, nor is it systematic. There is no “also,” because it is a thinking in a system. The extent, to which the concept of a system dominates his work, is something Tillich himself admitted in the introduction to the first volume of *Systematic Theology*: “I have never been able to think theologically in any other way than systematically. The smallest problem, if taken seriously and radically, led me to all the others, anticipating the whole in which these would find their solution.” (Tillich 1951, vii.)

Indeed, Tillich’s works are remarkable for their unity, and the English version (written after his emigration in 1933) can be considered as one large treatise. It is a thinking that emphasizes the whole, a single basic model that can explain all the components, a general principle, around which all the differences are gathered. If Tillich were only concerned with the coherence of propositions, with logical coherence, he would simply be a “systemic thinker,” but what makes him a thinker in a system is his principled refusal to satisfy his intellectual passion with anything less than the whole. All problems must be solved by absorbing them into a unified arch-schema.

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Tillich was convinced that thinking inexorably leads to the discovery of ultimate truths and that constructing systems is very much a part of human nature: “the history of human thought has been and is now the history of great systems” (Tillich 1951, 59). In making this declaration, Tillich risks approaching the stylistics of traditional metaphysics, a position that few theologians or philosophers have held since Hegel (with the exception of the neo-Thomists). Thus, by equating thought with systematicity, Tillich argued that both philosophy and theology must appear in a system, and he himself became one of those rare philosophers of religion who, in the post-Hegelian era, constructed a system of philosophical theology, in which the answers to fundamental existential questions were presented in the form of traditional Christian symbols. Such an idea immediately raises the question of whether

systematic thought and the existential nature of faith are compatible. If so, is this perhaps embodied in Tillich's system?

Tillich argued that systematicity is only a form that does not distort the content of the teaching, especially when each part of the system begins with a section on existential analysis. However, the myth of existential analysis without assumptions has long since collapsed, so we can conclude that the hermeneutics of symbols (theological answers) in Tillich's system is dependent on existential analysis (the questions raised by the human situation). At the same time, it is unconvincing that a system as a form of teaching is necessary. Just as Kierkegaard observed, a system as a form does not necessarily have to present a complete position, so it is not always necessary to write systems (Kierkegaard 2000, 8).

122 It is noteworthy that Tillich's system stems from the distinction proposed by Hegel himself between the concept of "religion in general" and "concrete, existing religions." The latter are the first historical expressions and progressive manifestations of religious experience. Hegel clearly wanted to emphasize that the abstract concept of religion is something different from concrete religions. For Tillich, "religion" in a broad sense meant a certain "depth" in every aspect of human activity, cultural or mental, theoretical or practical. In this sense, religion is the experience of the unconditional, which Tillich would later replace with the ultimate concern. In a narrower sense, "religion" is a specific socio-cultural sphere that exists alongside other spheres. As Clayton notes, the root of this dualism can be found in Hegel's philosophy. In his lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel distinguishes the concept of "religion in general" from "concrete, existing religions" (Clayton 1980, 91). As mentioned, the latter mark the first historical expressions and progressive manifestations of religion. Using his favorite metaphor of the tree, which was used by ancient thinkers, Hegel argues that the history of religion is potentially given in the abstract concept of religion, so this history is the development of the latter. Every religion, even the most imperfect one, contributes to the development of the perfect religion.

Inspired by these ideas, Tillich distinguishes Christianity from its "foundation." Like Hegel, he believes that "the tendencies inherent in other cultures and religions anticipate and are fulfilled in the Christian response"

(Tillich 1951, 15). Thus, in Christianity the “religious principle” or the “idea of universal theology” is most successfully manifested. However, this means that Christianity as a religion in the narrow sense is not as fundamental as its foundation. Even the attributes traditionally attributed to the Church—holiness, monolithicity—, according to Tillich, “can only be applied to the foundation” (Tillich 1963, 337). The only distinctiveness that elevates Christianity above other religions is the superiority of its foundation (the Christological event). Thus, paradoxically, no particular religion (not even Christianity) can be fundamental in the absolute sense, although if any religion can supplant Christianity, it is only a more perfect form of Christianity itself. When theology is understood in a universal sense, as an interpretation of religion in general, the theologies of various religions in a narrower sense become subtypes of this knowledge. Similarly, Christian theology can provide deeper knowledge than one could achieve without it, but it is only one of the “information channels of holiness.”

So, there is one thing that Tillich certainly does not mean when he speaks of Christianity: its unparalleled authority, that is, the unconditional acceptance of knowledge. This attitude stems from philosophical theology as a project of uncommitted, independent thinking. Thus, Tillich is not inclined to quickly accept the postulates of faith, but rather to analyze the conclusions of knowledge first. Where a believer speaks of the knowledge of God, Tillich sees rituals, symbols, and myths, and asks: what is the substance of these manifestations? Christianity is characterized by religious substance (truth), but only a universal philosophical theology can reveal this truth.

However, if the superiority of Christian theology (over other confessions) is the ability to fully and definitively express the idea of theology itself, this presupposes that we already have knowledge of what constitutes the idea of theology and can interpret a specific theological tradition from the perspective of universal knowledge. This relationship between concept and symbol is reflected in Tillich’s statement: “Without a corresponding understanding of ‘being’ and ‘the power of being’ it is impossible to speak meaningfully about grace.” (Tillich 1957, 125.) It is clear that the basis of universal theology is a certain worldview of speculative ontology.

Incorporating Kierkegaard's ideas into a system

We have mentioned that such a fostering of metaphysical systematicity as we find in Tillich's system has rarely been found in philosophy since the time of Hegel. As is known, Hegel's most ardent opponent was Kierkegaard (Westphal 1997, Lippitt 2003). Of course, there were other critics of Hegel, but their critiques ended with the proposal of a supposedly more perfect system (Hannay and Marino 1997, Conway 2002). By contrast, Kierkegaard radically questioned systematic thinking itself, or rather, "thinking in a system." In the name of the Christian faith, he rejected not just certain elements of Hegel's thought but the very concept of "system."

124 In the case of Tillich, we have an ambiguous situation. He often criticizes Hegel on the basis of Kierkegaard's ideas and also gives meaning to the concept of "existence," so it may seem (as is often uncritically and positively stated) that Tillich unconditionally follows the "father of existentialism" (Tillich 1948, 98). Yet, in defending the necessity of a system in theology, Tillich takes the opposite side of the barricades to Kierkegaard. This ambiguity encourages us to treat Tillich's existentialism in an original way.

Tillich, although he derived existentialism from the ideas of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Marx, sought parallels in the 20th century in the works of Heidegger and Sartre, which have been recognized as "one of the main influences on his thinking" (Kegley and Bretall 1952, 11). Tillich sought the roots of his existential philosophy both in the works of Schelling and in the philosophy of Hegel: "the revolt against Hegel's essentialist philosophy was embodied by using Hegel's own existentialist elements, albeit in a subdued form" (Tillich 1999, 100). This quotation is significant, because it reveals Tillich's attitude towards existentialist philosophy. He is often called a Christian existentialist, but this label requires so many qualifications that it quickly becomes meaningless. First of all, Tillich never thought that the existentialist treatment of the world could be sufficient. On the contrary, existentialist elements must inevitably be linked to their opposites, essentialist elements, because "they themselves ultimately make a negative contribution to knowledge" (Tillich 1951, 154). It is also worth noting his comments made in the article "On the Boundary Line": "I have never been an existentialist in the

sense that Kierkegaard or Heidegger are. All meaningful existential statements are based on their opposites, essentialist insights.” (Tillich 1960, 437.) In this piece, Tillich emphasized that a well-founded existentialist philosophy relies on implicit essentialist elements, which in the case of a theological system are not only inevitable, but must also be stated out loud.

Here, he calls his research essentialist, which allows him to criticize Hegel’s ideas on the basis of Kierkegaard’s criticism. Kierkegaard’s entire doctrine emphasizes the impossibility of uniting Christianity and speculative philosophy. The title of the book *Either/Or* (1992) is a body and a practical program. It is a demand for self-determination, action, and a leap of faith, a call for the individual to decide for himself, and not to try to justify existential self-determination by appealing to the laws of the intellect or the nature of the objectively perceived universe. In short, Kierkegaard believes that man’s relationship to his own existence requires unconditional recognition of the supremacy of the authority of faith over reason. And in Tillich’s view, essentialist philosophy can include a discussion of existence, and it can also find a place for faith.

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The most obvious “gaps” in the system of thought occur, when Tillich “borrows” an idea from Kierkegaard and immediately transforms it. For example, in the following passage, he discusses the formal criteria of (universal) theology: “The object of theology is that which is of ultimate concern to us. Only those propositions are theological which discuss their object insofar as this can become the object of ultimate concern to us.” (Tillich 1951, 12.) Tillich links the concept of “ultimate concern” to Kierkegaard’s “infinite passion and interest,” undoubtedly drawing on the Dane’s description of Christianity as “a maximally personal, infinite, passionate concern for one’s own eternal happiness” (Kierkegaard 1941, 261). But are the concepts used by these thinkers synonymous? Although they are not contradictory, the contexts, in which they are used, vary significantly. Tillich implements what Kierkegaard singled out as a manifestation of essentialist thinking, that is, the “immanent transition of speculative philosophy” (Kierkegaard 1941, 33). The transition occurs, when the statement (in Tillich) is declared general, establishing a universal class of theological statements. Kierkegaard, by contrast, assumes a distinction. Although he also seeks to define, he defines a certain specific

“Christian religion.” He also does not draw any universal conclusions, and the word “personal” disappears in Tillich’s version. Tillich’s second formal (universal) theological criterion states: “The ultimate concern is that which determines our being and non-being. Only those statements are theological which concern the object insofar as it can become for us a matter of being and non-being.” (Tillich 1951, 14.)

Such an analysis of ultimate concern does not coincide with Kierkegaard’s “infinite, personal, passionate interest.” For Kierkegaard, interest is infinite, when the individual is confronted with Christian truths and must decide for himself about them. The individual can discover infinite interest perhaps, because Christianity is precisely the promise of infinite happiness:

Christianity offers to grant infinite happiness to the individual man, thus foreseeing the infinite interest of such happiness as the *conditio sine qua non*; an interest for which the individual does not hate father and mother, and therefore definitely rejects speculative systems and the outlines of universal history. (Kierkegaard 1941, 19.)

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In such a context, it is meaningless to talk about deciding for something abstract, say, in terms of such a universal concept as “Being.” The addition of “my being” does not change the situation and seems dramatic, because, in this case, such a type of being is still envisaged, which universally characterizes such a being as a human being (no one has ever met him anywhere), and this Tillich defines as “the totality, structure, meaning and purpose of human reality”—a definition, for which a speculative system is necessary to illuminate. So, instead of the individual person, focusing on his or her own infinite happiness, Tillich offers speculative claims about the meaning of existence itself.

Theological criteria are not the only examples of Tillich’s free play with Kierkegaard’s ideas. Usually, the same system is in operation: first, the “existentialist” idea of Kierkegaard is presented, then it is transformed and included in the system. However, the example of criteria is quite radical, because here Tillich, by formalizing Kierkegaard’s thesis that the individual can be infinitely concerned with his infinite happiness, “gets rid” of both the individual and his interest in his happiness. Here, an ultimate concern is raised, without any specific content. This allows us to move on to a completely different

object than in Kierkegaard's case, namely, to being or non-being (the birth of a system). According to Hamilton, Kierkegaard emphasizes that the systematic thinker does not have to resort to faith as a source of truth (Hamilton 1963, 48). The system itself brings truth into being. The most that such a thinker can do is to recognize that faith is a necessary element (alongside knowledge) on the path to truth. However, only the authority of the system decides, where truth is and where it is not. From this point of view, all religions include both truth and error, and the system is the agency that separates the wheat from the chaff. Only on the basis of authoritative knowledge can the system serve the Christian faith. Kierkegaard denies that the individual can sum up the whole of reality in a system. This is how he treats the limits of human knowledge:

Since it is impossible to think existence, but nevertheless the existing individual still thinks, what does that mean? This means that he thinks with interruptions, that he thinks before and after. His thinking cannot achieve absolute continuity. Only in a fantastic way can the existing individual be constantly *sub specie aeterni*. (Kierkegaard 1941, 207.)

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This is Kierkegaard's version of Spinoza's concept, which expresses the fundamental error of systematic thinking—to treat life “from the standpoint of eternity,” ignoring existential conditionality.

Question and answer: How unfortunate is love?

Kierkegaard asks whether truth can be learned. In other words, is truth given and we need only to discover it, or are we unable to do it ourselves and as such must turn to an external source (Christian revelation)? To revelation as an incomparable authority or to Christ as a “teacher” Kierkegaard opposes the Socratic position. If the student is self-sufficient in a certain sense, then the teacher is merely an aid, a stimulus.

It is precisely the Platonic position (which states that if you ask a question, you already have a partial answer) that underlies Tillich's philosophical theology. The questioning presupposes an a priori unity, the longing of which the question reveals. The metaphor of question–answer, illustrating the methodological foundation of Tillich's philosophical theology, also

presupposes another typology of “unhappy love” presented by Kierkegaard. For the latter, the inequality of God and man is “unhappy love,” but not in the case, when lovers cannot (yet) be together, but when love is separated by such a difference that “mutual understanding is impossible” (Kierkegaard 2000, 13).

128 Tillich represents the second version of unhappy love, which, in Kierkegaard’s view, is only relatively, not absolutely, “unhappy.” The discussion of love does not actually affect, but rather underpins, the understanding of faith itself in Tillich’s systematic theology. This analysis is important, as it forms the basis for merging Tillich’s system with Christian knowledge and traditional theology. This topic is also a kind of indicator, revealing whether Kierkegaard is right in stating that all existential decisions in the system are conditioned by metaphysical speculations. After all, faith is so closely connected with individuality that any system that analyzes it must inevitably reveal the fundamental statements characterizing human existence. At first glance, Tillich’s cherished “ultimate concern” corresponds to the existential formulation, since the system itself clearly states what true faith is, that is, what most concerns a person. However, it does not ask what John or Peter believes in faith. The existential basis of faith is reduced to a generalized formula of faith. Although Tillich makes considerable efforts to restore the authentic meaning of the term “faith,” he himself puts forward a related concept, which, according to him, much more directly expresses “true reality,” surpassing “preliminary faith.” This concept is “love.”

As is known, more than one interpretation of love (*eros*, *philia*, *agape*) has been presented in the discourse of the philosophy of religion. According to Tillich himself, “faith, as a state of ultimate concern, implies love, or rather, the desire to unite what is separated” (Tillich 1999, 100). Let us note that Tillich is not in a hurry to identify faith with love. The whole procedure initially defines faith in terms of ultimate concern and only then notes that such a situation presupposes love. Let us recall what the second formal criterion of theology says: man is most concerned with nothing other than his own being and non-being. Man’s true concern is that infinity, on which he originally depends, from which he is separated, but which he eventually longs for, and this longing grounds love. Thus, recalling Kierkegaard’s lamentations, existence is taken to heaven.

The concept of separateness reveals an ambiguous situation: man is both separated from the whole and essentially belongs to it and therefore is not essentially separate. However, this definition contradicts that tradition of religious philosophy that has tended to distinguish between *agape* and *eros*, for where we find *eros*, there cannot be a free expression of love for the other, such as God's *agape* for fallen humanity in Jesus Christ. Love that seeks ultimate unity for the sake of the other does not ultimately turn to the other; it seeks unity. Then the existent man is loved not as existing, but as Being, that is, for what he potentially, not actually is. Consistently developing Tillich's argument, it turns out that God loves Himself; after all, what else is there to love, but Being Itself, which is God. This is not the biblical love of God for the one created in His image and fallen into sin, when He loves His eternal image in man. Such love becomes "eternal self-love." Thus, in the system, *eros* reign in terms of love, and love in terms of faith. Everything, as Kierkegaard warned, is decided from beyond. The meaning of Tillich's definition of faith, then, is as follows: faith is the ultimate concern, and the ultimate concern coincides with the desire to overcome existential alienation. Thus, faith does not point to the existence of the individual, but is the "wisdom" of discovering the hidden potentialities within oneself and perceiving oneself as a part of divine reality.

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"God of the system": gnostic or pistic?

For Tillich, "standing on the edge" gives the opportunity to see that truth is a whole. Also, such a position shows how the biblical and Protestant concepts of trust in a forgiving God are encompassed and transcended in the concept of the eternal unity of God and man. The last statement is not unexpected. After all, if, as we have mentioned, the system provides its own revelation, it is natural that it must also name its God. The descriptive name of the God of the system is "that which is unconditional." However, such a name does not yet distinguish Him from other gods, and this gap is filled by the concept of "God above God." This God is real, because He transcends any symbols of personalistic religions, so the system gives God a true name.

However, a person immersed in existence cannot do without symbols. The search for divinity in the depths of the human soul is possible only thanks to

the historical religions of mankind and their symbols. Thus, Tillich chooses the God of the system ("God above God"), not in order to give Him a suitable name, but rather to show the relationship with the God of a specific faith. The God of the system cannot be worshiped in the same way as other gods; he cannot be given a name like the gods of world religions. The believer cannot address him directly. He who knows that there is only one true God can address him by a name that is established in the tradition of religious faith, knowing that his true devotion transcends addressing a nameless finality. Thus, a person can accept Christian symbols as his ultimate concern and still not be a believer. He knows that the highest reality lies beyond any specific faith and is not to be found in the God proclaimed by any particular religion.

130 Religious faith is not the same as absolute faith, which finds a God above God. It is not worshipful, everyday faith. In this, Tillich also achieves a paradoxical result: although he very much does not want anyone to kneel before this (religious) God, he leaves no possibility of choosing religious practice, and such a situation can lead to a renewed return to the confession of traditional religions. At the same time, Tillich establishes an absolute faith in immediate experience, thus inevitably laying the foundation for his symbolic language (since reality appears to finite being through symbols). Therefore, when Tillich speaks of the "finiteness that is self-contained in Being," he acknowledges that this is a "highly symbolic language" (Tillich 1999, 139). In this way, the purpose of the system, "to interpret the content of Christian faith," becomes a methodological translation of the symbols of revelation into the symbols of the system, which localizes truth within the system itself. In other words, Tillich fails to take into account that by giving God a name, a new faith is proclaimed, in this case, a faith in the symbolic statements of the system, when it is believed that they are the best possible explanation of the symbols of religious faith; hence, belief in the system.

Tillich's "God above God" is based on the axioms of the system. This means that, although it is as sound as the arguments supporting it, it is also just as weak as those arguments are. The weak point of Tillich's system is the solution to the question of God's existence: "The question of God's existence can neither be asked nor answered," because "it is a question that by its very nature lies beyond existence" (Tillich 1951, 237). Such a non-existence of God means that,

instead of participating in a truly divine power, man must rise above existence. The New Being overcomes the ambiguities of existence only by withdrawing man from the existential dimension.

The God of the system is the God of everything except the individual who exists. Let us recall Kierkegaard: "Immanently (in the fantastic meditation of abstraction) God does not exist, he is only God, who exists only for the existing man, that is, he can exist only in faith. Providence, resurrection exist only for the existing man." (Kierkegaard 1941, 71.) From the point of view of the system, the discovery of oneself is the discovery of God, and vice versa, so the fulfillment of human being merges with the basis of Being: "faith is not an opinion, but a state" (Tillich 1999, 130). However, it is impossible to get rid of individuality as a garment, in order to discover divinity. Man remains an existing being even when deeply immersed in speculative thought, therefore, his actual fulfillment cannot be a state (albeit an eternal one, but covered by the difficulties of existence); it is a relationship. Although God is eternal and therefore "does not exist," He nevertheless exists for man in Jesus Christ, thus confirming the possibility of a relationship. This is precisely the absolute paradox, accessible only to faith, which the system, guided by the pursuit of rationality, resolves by interpreting symbols according to its postulates.

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The system's "God above God" is true and the only one sufficient for human needs. However, it can satisfy only the needs of man himself at that hour, when traditional symbols have truly lost their power and are meaningless, and the individual is concerned with his true being, balancing on the edge of the human situation. However, such a God is powerless to help man in his individuality, in his personal hopes and fears, which do not touch on man's own questions about reality itself.

Tillich did not learn from Kierkegaard to deny that truth can ultimately be personal. Contrary to Tillich's universalism, Kierkegaard's interiority requires risk (Lowrie 1968, Pattison 2005), which for Tillich is only a temporary companion of existential conditionality. True (absolute) faith depends only on eternal power, about which we cannot be mistaken, because its nature transcends existence. Faith is "based on a foundation that is not a risk: it is the awareness of the unconditional element in us and in our world" (Tillich 1959, 28). Those believers who rely on interiority remain open to the risk of

losing their faith, never discovering the “God” who appears when the anxiety of doubt drowns God (Tillich 1999, 140).

Kierkegaard categorically denies that an existing person is capable of acquiring the wisdom of eternal truth, of transcending the limit of finitude, which can only be approached, so we must live on the basis of the authority of faith, not by objectively justifying it, but by subjectively trusting it. To speak from the standpoint of existence about something that encompasses all of human existence is fantastical and absurd; it is like being both inside and outside at the same time, like trying to meet oneself around the corner. However, can we reasonably explain unequivocally how Kierkegaard understands faith as an experience of paradox, a blind action? If we characterize Tillich’s religious thinking as *gnosis*, then let us also expand on the sense, in which we could attribute *pistis* to Kierkegaard’s thinking.

132 This Greek term for faith in the New Testament has specific connotations that allow us to look at Kierkegaard’s understanding of faith in a different way (Wyschogrod 1954, Evans 1996). In the Greek worldview, there was a deep awareness that it is impossible to exist without *pistis* in something. For example, when getting out of bed in the morning, one may confess *pistis* in the sense of believing that the floor will not slip. Thus, *pistis* is a faith that requires an act of trust. Such a requirement involves risk; it is practical knowledge recognized in the *episteme*. Thus, *pistis* is not conviction, but fidelity, even loyalty. Faith, then, is not a feeling, but an action in another ancient sense—service to the master, the customer (whom his clients or servants usually did not see), who gives gifts. In this sense, the model of a personal relationship with God, or the concept of Jesus Christ as a good friend, is very modern.

When seriously ill characters in the biblical stories waited for Christ, they experienced a suffering based not on blind faith, but on evidence (previous miraculous events). A person experiencing suffering does not ask God for something that He does not want to give, which is against God’s will (instructions on how and what to ask for are given in prayers). Recall Kierkegaard’s view that a person can believe or not believe, but they cannot believe based on reason. The famous interpretation of the myth of Abraham illustrates faith in the face of the absurd, beyond the ethically seeking experience. However, we can ask whether Abraham really experiences the absurd. Or, perhaps he is just

loyal, and his trust is based on previous manifestations of God's omnipotence and loving-kindness (his wife Sarah gives birth at a very advanced age). If so, Abraham can reasonably expect that God will stop the cruel process or resurrect Isaac (which is what happens). These considerations raise the main question: is Abraham's action irrational? If we answer in the affirmative, we must also abandon Kierkegaard's idea that there can be only one (blind) faith, and thus we come closer to Tillich's position that true unbelief is to cover up moral contradictions with prior loyalty. In other words, the only difference is that Tillich's own loyalty is based on ontological assumptions—by rejecting blind faith, he approaches ancient thinking, which treats faith not as a request for “forgiveness,” not emotionally, subjectively, but as a desire to regain the original, true state of man.

Conclusions

The paradoxical nature of religious language in Tillich's philosophical theology does not mean that reason is suspended. Tillich believes that man must strive to understand himself as *sub specie aeterni*, which is the task of philosophy (and every man is potentially a philosopher). Such a goal is based on essentialist thinking, which, after significant modifications, also includes the statements of existentialists. In Tillich's philosophical theology, subjectivity is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for authentic religiosity. Tillich rejects Kierkegaard's belief that truth can ultimately be personal. Contrary to Tillich's universalism, Kierkegaard's interiority is essentially unprotected from the risks that, for Tillich, are merely a temporary companion of existential conditionality.

To the concept of faith as paradoxical thinking (Kierkegaard), Tillich opposes a worldview guided by the era's concept of love and outlined by the doctrine of logos. In such a context, the method of correlation, originally intended to maintain the status of mutually influencing, but independent elements of Christian knowledge and existential analysis, can be understood as a methodological presentation of an essentialist worldview that presupposes a fundamental identity of philosophy and theology. From this, we can conclude that correlation in Tillich's philosophical theology can be interpreted as the subordination of *pistis* (faith) to *gnosis* (knowledge).

As such, recognizing the ability of Christian philosophical theology to fully express the Idea of theology itself (which takes the form of formal theological criteria), Tillich presupposes such knowledge that constitutes the core of a universal theological idea, independent of specific historical religions. At the same time, the affirmation of the theological norm in an ontological dimension allows us to view revelation as a symbolic system, explicable by certain ontological criteria.

In Kierkegaard's thought, the relationship of man to his own existence presupposes the unconditional supremacy of the authority of faith over reason. From the perspective of the system, essentialist philosophy can encompass the discussion of existence and also find a place for faith. Yet, if we interpret the Abrahamic myth based on the concept of faith as trust (*pistis*), Kierkegaard's explanation of the paradoxical situation of myth as blind faith is opposed to a certain knowledge-based, loyal trust. Therefore, Abraham's action should be considered rational, which is supported by the postulates of Tillich's system.

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Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev
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| Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić



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Demarcations | Razmejitve

Damir Barbarić | Dragan Prole | Artur R. Boelderl | Johannes Vorlauffer | Cathrin Nielsen | Virgilio Cesarone | Mario Kopić | Petr Prášek | Žarko Paić | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Emanuele Severino | Jonel Kolić | Jordan Huston

