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## Framing, Fragmenting, and Freud: Models of the Self and Faith Formation in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch

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*Paul Tillich and Pitirim A. Sorokin on Love:  
Dialogue between Science and Religion*

### **Business Meeting**

Robison B. James, University of Richmond  
Mary Ann Stenger, University of Louisville  
*Presiding*

**FRAMING, FRAGMENTING, AND FREUD (?):  
MODELS OF THE SELF AND FAITH  
FORMATION  
IN PAUL TILlich AND IRIS MURDOCH**

**Jonathan Rothchild**

Editor's Note: Jonathan Rothchild of the University of Chicago received the Paul Tillich Prize for the best paper submitted by a graduate student at the annual banquet in Toronto in November of 2002.

Consistently a thinker situated on the boundary, Paul Tillich appropriates disparate symbolic resources to illuminate the inherent tension between the fragmentary character of existence and the transcendental status of human essence. The purpose of this essay is to probe two such resources, art and psychoanalysis, which constitute self-reflexive models of the self. The objective of this analysis is to gain critical purchase on Tillich's diagnosis of the self and its relevance to faith formation. Art and psychoanalysis share affinities with Tillich's method of correlation and its interconnection between culture, morality, and religion. That is, in terms of Tillichian language of the spirit, art draws upon self-creativity, but it also can induce the experience of "ecstasy" and self-transcendence, while psychoanalysis lays bare the experience of "insight" or self-integration. Pursuit of these inquiries will be enhanced by engagement of an interlocutor, philosopher Iris Murdoch and her magnum opus, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, for her notions of the flawed self and moral transformation and her realist retrieval of moral ontology resonate deeply with Tillich's sensibilities.

I argue that Tillich and Murdoch are unique thinkers who, despite their divergence on significant points (e.g., Good and good, work and grace, and metaphysics and ontology),<sup>1</sup> can redress general inadequacies of postmodern models of self and faith formation—the dearth of self-critique, the reduction

of ontological and metaphysical claims, the disavowal of consciousness and moral perception—because they reconfigure banal pictures of the self into dynamic conceptions of humans as creative and transcendent agents within culture, morality, and religion.

The first section of the essay concentrates on the import of art for self-understanding, the interrelation between religion and culture, and the development of faith and morals. Tillich and Murdoch contend that the experiences of pictures and symbols function as *sine qua non* vehicles for accessing the depths of the human condition. The importance of symbols underscores the extent to which humans are image-bearers and image-receptors who conceive of themselves, others, and the world through visual prisms. As Platonic realists of different sorts, Tillich and Murdoch appreciate the allegory of the cave (*Republic*, Book VII: 514-520d) as its metaphysical pictures disclose the basic human mode of being in the world: using efficacious metaphors and images (Murdoch) and transcendent symbols (Tillich) to picture the real and to do the good. Consequently, art—both by embodying polyvalent structures of form and by engendering the dissolution of form—can reify the fragmentary condition and the transformative capabilities of humanity as well as disclose the metaphysical reality of others (Murdoch) and express ultimate concern (Tillich). The principal difference between Murdoch and Tillich on this point derives from Murdoch's attention to literature as a normative source, which problematizes Tillich's preference for painting as the preferred artistic expression.

The second section considers another model employed by Tillich, psychoanalysis. Tillich submits that the conceptual tools of psychoanalysis "interpenetrate" the implicitly theological notions of estrangement, the centered-self, and healing. His insight gainsays overtures of the collapse of theology after Freud; rather, psychoanalysis can marshal resources that facilitate—rather than the current perspective, that is, to deconstruct—the conceptualization of the self as flawed but redeemable and the formation of faith as ultimate concern. The inclusion

of Murdoch again becomes relevant because she attenuates the contribution of psychoanalysis; in her judgment, it further perpetuates the illusions of the relentless ego. The attitudes of Tillich and Murdoch vis-à-vis psychoanalysis become perplexing when, through the hermeneutical lens of Paul Ricoeur, one notes the intrinsic relationship between reader and text and analyst and analysand. The previous discussion of literature is thus reconceived in light of questions raised by psychoanalysis pertaining to the self and faith formation.

The conclusion attempts to synthesize these points and to offer constructive proposals for contemporary visions of the self and the formation of axiological concerns and moral convictions. Tillich and Murdoch can contribute significantly to contemporary discussions of the self and faith formation because—in contrast to thinkers who privilege narrative or the primordial claims of the other—they mediate between the importance of theoretical transformative models and the relevance of the vicissitudes of the situation.

### I. A Symbols and the Import of Art

Theologian James Mackey discusses the role of art and its ramifications for humanity and reality. Contending that postmodernity's putative dualism between mind and body—the perduring consequence of a corruption of Descartes' philosophy exemplified in thinkers ranging from Hume and Kant, Sartre and Levinas, and “the holy Trinity of postmodernism—Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida”<sup>2</sup>—results in the loss of the self and, concomitantly, the loss of reality. Mackey envisages art as a means to re-conceptualize properly self and reality. He argues, however, that appeal to art creates an interesting dilemma for students of the human condition. This appeal will “make at once too much and too little of humanity” because, on the one hand, it can focus too extensively on humanity and on “talk of *humanizing* reality,” yet, on the other hand, it can concentrate too exclusively on fragility and the “permanent existential threatenedness”<sup>3</sup> that risks vitiating the reality of humanity. Tillich, following Plato and Schelling, remains acutely cognizant regarding the dangers of idolatry and the splendors of expressive profundity of artistic images. As we will soon discover, Tillich, like Murdoch, perceives the necessity of art to render meaning for human creatures who are not bifurcated between mind and body, but who are transcendent and yet fragmented

and estranged from themselves, others, and the world.

In his autobiography *On the Boundary*, Tillich poignantly describes his first experiences of art during World War I: “I recall most vividly my first encounter—almost a revelation—with a Botticelli painting in Berlin during my last furlough of the war. Out of the philosophical and theological reflection that followed these experiences, I developed some fundamental categories of philosophy of religion and culture, viz., form and substance.”<sup>4</sup> These existential encounters with art and the derived structural categories permeate Tillich's discussion of the various dimensions of reality. Tillich writes in *The Courage to Be*: “Modern art is not propaganda, but revelation. It shows that the reality of our existence is as it is. It does not cover up the reality in which we are living.”<sup>5</sup> Art exposes levels of reality in all their ontological, epistemological, and axiological complexities, and, as Tillich iterates throughout his *Systematic Theology*, art may constitute revelation because it can grasp us as an absolute and engender ultimate concern in a method similar to genuine symbols.<sup>6</sup>

The most apposite religious symbol for Tillich is the picture of the New Being in Jesus Christ. Tillich describes the transformative power of this image: “through this picture the New Being has power to transform those who are transformed by it. This implies that there is an *analogia imaginis*, namely, an analogy between the picture and the actual personal life from which it has arisen.”<sup>7</sup> This *analogia imaginis* underlies humanity's encounter with and construal of cultural symbols and invites participation in these realities. Tillich's examination of the relevance of art remains consonant with his envisioned task of a theonomous analysis of culture: “It is the task of deciphering the style of an autonomous culture in all its characteristic expressions and of finding their hidden religious significance.”<sup>8</sup>

### I. B. Tillich on Painting and Literature

Let us consider a specific example of a painting embraced by Tillich for its “hidden religious significance” and its ability to express ultimate concern. Commemorating the tragic bombing of a Spanish town by Fascist forces, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* is denominated by Tillich as “the best present-day [1950s'] Protestant picture.”<sup>9</sup> How can a secular entity be tantamount to a religious symbol? Tillich isolates its style, or that which points to its self-

interpretation and meaning, and states: “Picasso’s *Guernica* is profoundly religious in this implicit sense because it expresses so honestly and powerfully modern man’s anguished search for ultimate meaning and his passionate revolt against cruelty and hatred.”<sup>10</sup> Experimenting with abstract forms that express the struggle to discover—albeit fragmentarily amid the chaos, horror, and violence of the moment that is *kairos*—the meaningfulness of the whole and ultimate concern, Picasso “wrought a picture of seemingly extreme ugliness, but in actuality, a picture of great beauty.”<sup>11</sup> This picture of great beauty is a cultural expression circumscribed in a particular historical context; yet, its style discloses in its extreme ugliness an unconditioned meaning that asks ultimate questions, thereby transcending itself and lying on the boundary between culture and religion. On this boundary, one encounters the ecstatic experience that “does not destroy the structure of reason” but drives reason “beyond the limits of its finitude”<sup>12</sup> to the presence of the ultimate.

Tillich’s dynamic boundary between culture and religion, however, does disavow putatively religious paintings, including Heinrich Hoffman’s *Christ in Gethsemane*, that neither express this great beauty nor communicate the depths of the human and ultimate concern. According to Tillich in his early essay “On the Idea of a Theology of Culture,” such pictures are not truly religious because their ordinary content (*Inhalt*) fails to “break through” to their spiritual substance and religious import (*Gehalt*).<sup>13</sup> These prosaic paintings reduce the profundity of images from one of ultimate concern that induces ecstatic awareness to a superficial portrayal that fails to challenge the human fear of reality, to transform radically ordinary reality, and to anticipate the new possibilities of being.<sup>14</sup> Manifested, for example, in the work of Cézanne, van Gogh, and Munch, expressionism satisfies these shortcomings because, predicated on its novelty and *sui generis* style, it “breaks away from the horizontal movement and shows the Spiritual Presence in symbols of broken finitude.”<sup>15</sup>

Tillich is also captivated by the disclosive power of other forms of art, including architecture. Tillich increasingly becomes interested in architecture, including the notion of “sacred void” and the absence of form. He envisions tremendous innovations in religious architecture: “It is quite probable that the renewal of religious art will start in co-operation with architecture.”<sup>16</sup> Yet, for purposes of this essay, Tillich’s passion for literature is most pertinent. His *On the Boundary* recounts his early, intense existen-

tial identification with Hamlet as well as his sporadic, but impassioned reading of classical novels. He then summarizes his rather confounding attitude toward literature: “Literature, however, contained too much philosophy to be able to satisfy fully the desire for pure artistic contemplation. The discovery of painting was a crucial experience for me.”<sup>17</sup> To be sure, Tillich appreciates the “artistic contemplation” and power of literature,<sup>18</sup> but he seems reticent to affirm its self-transcendence as sanguinely as in the genre of paintings. We will revisit this point below in reference to Murdoch.

### I. C. Murdoch on Art

Iris Murdoch also conceptualizes art as an integral feature and consequence of humans as “fantasizing imaginative animals” whose “[i]ntellect is naturally one-making.”<sup>19</sup> While she does value the human imaginative capacities, Murdoch argues that we humans are tyrannized by our fat, relentless egos<sup>20</sup> and that our fantasies dominate our performative modes of being in the world. She appropriates the Platonic image of the cave to express our limited and blemished capacities: “The mind is indeed besieged or crowded by selfish dream life. Plato used the word *eikasia*, best translated here as ‘illusion’ or ‘fantasy,’ to indicate the most benighted human state, the lowest condition in the Cave. He also uses the word *phantasia* in this sense. He connects egoistic fantasy and lack of moral sense with inability to reflect.”<sup>21</sup> Solipsistic images, analogous to the flattened symbols repudiated by Tillich, simply reinforce this egoistic fantasy and perpetuate human blindness vis-à-vis the moral Good and the concrete reality of the other. Quite comfortable in the cave, we humans are relegated to a restricted life of mimetic shadow-making and ethical self-obsession.

Nevertheless, Murdoch asserts that deep pictures illumined by the Form provide clarifying images of the real and the good that discipline the soul and promote moral progress out of the cave. Analogous to Tillich’s claim that genuine images and symbols accommodate both moments of existence and the ontological polarities, Murdoch synthesizes metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and ethics: “This is metaphysics, which sets up a picture which it then offers as an appeal to us all to see if we cannot find just this in our deepest experience.”<sup>22</sup> Pictures of the good, often vouchsafed in what Murdoch calls “good art,” penetrate the deepest recesses of human convictions about truth, love, and goodness. Hence,

consistent with Tillich's language of *analogia imaginis*, Murdoch avers the necessity of art for the moral life and faith formation: "Serious discussion of states of consciousness, thinking, moral reflection, quality of being needs to use imagery and resort to art."<sup>23</sup> This "resort to art" is mandated by Murdoch's retrieval of the import of the inner life, that is, consciousness and imagination, for moral reflection. Tillich and Murdoch share a fundamental to art as mediating the problematic nexus between existence and essence. Murdoch identifies art's role in ameliorating the dissonance: "We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place."<sup>24</sup>

Murdoch grounds her claims for the importance of art and the retrieval of consciousness and imagination on the basis of attention and attachments. Attention and attachments lie at the heart of her definition of morality: "Morality, as the ability or attempt to be good, rests upon deep areas of sensibility and creative imagination, upon removal from one state to another, upon shift of attachments, upon love and respect for the contingent details of the world."<sup>25</sup> As mentioned above, Murdoch insists that natural human selfishness precludes suitable attention to the other; however, through the artifices of paintings, novels, and plays that induce spiritual discipline, art can "break the ego, destroying the illusory whole of the unified self."<sup>26</sup> The broken individual thus shifts his or her attention away from solipsistic images to expansive pictures of the self, other, and world. Sustained attention and lucid perception of truth effect—or at least facilitate the efficacy of—virtuous action. Similar to Tillich's conception of Picasso's *Guernica* as a liminal space that transforms ordinary reality, Murdoch states:

Art illuminates accident and contingency and the general muddle of life, the limitations of time and the discursive intellect, so as to enable us to survey complex or horrible things which would otherwise appall us...Art makes places and opens spaces for reflection, it is a defense against materialism and against pseudo-scientific attitudes of life. It calms and invigorates, it gives us energy by unifying, possibly by purifying, our feelings. In enjoying great art we experience a clarification and concentration and perfection of our own consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

The key for both thinkers is not the content depicted, but rather the experience of "breaking

through" expressed as ultimate concern or as protracted attention to the other.

Markedly similar to Tillich's censure of pedestrian art that cannot invoke ultimate concern, Murdoch designates as "bad art" those images (e.g., television) that thwart self-reflection and self-criticism. Murdoch extends her concept of bad art to include consolation, which assuages the burden of moral transformation. Murdoch's incessant disquiet about the spiritual journey compels her to nuance the benefit of even good art: "Even good art may make us feel too much at ease with something less than the best; it offers a sort of spiritual exercise and what looks like a spiritual home, a kind of armchair sanctuary which may be a substitute for genuine moral effort."<sup>28</sup> She worries in particular about the consoling effects of religious art that convey salvation and grace. With some qualifications, Tillich appreciates these concerns regarding complacency and consolation; his Protestant principle, expressed most robustly and trenchantly by the cross, provides an implicit rejoinder to any definitive claims of the sacred in the finite.<sup>29</sup>

Murdoch's own work as a novelist raises intriguing questions about Tillich's apparent resistance to the significance of novels. *A fortiori*, Murdoch appeals to a number of novelists (e.g., Proust, Henry James, and Tolstoy) as interlocutors in various chapters—including chapters not ostensibly dedicated to discussions on art—of her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.<sup>30</sup> This inclusion of novels in her philosophical work signals her confidence that novels can illuminate our visions of goodness and truth. Among myriad instantiations of this confidence, Murdoch holds that novels "can give us a new vocabulary of experience, and a true picture of freedom," and compel us to undertake a "focusing of attention."<sup>31</sup> Murdoch upholds the "ordinariness" of novels and their abilities to present to us these very moments of ordinariness, not abstract speculations, that help lay bare the dialectic between existence and essence:

Characters in novels partake of the funniness and absurdity and contingent incompleteness and lack of dignity of people in ordinary life. We read here both the positive being of individuals and also their lack of formal wholeness. We are, as real people, unfinished and full of blankness and jumble; only in our own illusioning fantasy are we complete. Good novels concern the fight between good and evil and the pil-

grimage from appearance to reality. They expose vanity and inculcate humility.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, there are limits to the transcendence afforded by novels, which Murdoch herself notes.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Tillich's general characterization of literature as containing "too much philosophy" appears overstated; he undervalues the capacity of novels to depict life's random happenings—which in themselves have metaphysical implications—that would help Tillich articulate the specific life-details constituting the "situation."<sup>34</sup>

I conclude the discussion of art by juxtaposing two passages that provide, in my judgment, illuminating synopses of their views of the import of art. Both passages discuss Rilke and describe art's effects—effects that supersede the aesthetic, cognitive, and moral realms and penetrate love, truth, and ultimate concern. First, listen to Murdoch's explication of genuine attention in art that undergirds her cognitivist moral particularism and her pursuit a correspondence theory of truth:

[Rainer Maria Rilke's] remarks (all to Clara Rilke) [about Cézanne] exhibit, in a way which we may understand if we are acquainted with any art or craft, what kind of achievement 'pure cognition' or 'perception without reverie' might be: to do with 'animal attentiveness', 'good conscience,' 'only doing what you know,' 'simple truthfulness,' the 'consuming love in anonymous work.'<sup>35</sup>

Now, listen to Tillich's analysis of art's transformative effects on the whole person and the subject-object dynamic that are tantamount to a religious experience:

Art as such, whether liturgical or not, whether dealing with religious subject matter or not, penetrates, the subject-object reality in which we are living; but whether it penetrates ultimate reality is another question. One of the criteria that indicates something has been penetrated is that the meaning of one's total existence is involved, not only one's aesthetic existence. I remember a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke in which he spoke about a torso of an archaic Apollo and said that whenever he looked at it, it said to him 'Change thy life.' Now if this is experienced, the aesthetic experience is transformed; then the aesthetic has become a matter of ultimate concern and that means a religious experience has occurred.<sup>36</sup>

## II. A. Psychoanalysis: Healing, Grace, and Models of Encounter

Turning to another model of interpreting the self, Tillich appreciates the import of psychoanalysis for understanding the formation of the self and its concomitant faith formation. Tillich's own work influenced psychologists, including Rollo May, Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Erik Erikson. As illustrated in his *Systematic Theology*, *The Courage to Be*, and *Theology of Culture*, Tillich contends that psychoanalysis, like art, helps elucidate the relationships between self and world and the ontological polarities: "The recovery of the meaning of anxiety through the combined endeavors of existential philosophy, depth psychology, neurology, and the arts is one of the achievements of the twentieth century."<sup>37</sup> These related disciplines are valuable because they help enrich Tillich's language of "estrangement," "abyss," "eros," and "reunion" and clarify the distinctions between fear and anxiety.

Furthermore, Tillich submits that psychoanalysis can disabuse theologians of notions that the functions of the spirit can operate efficaciously without a critical recognition of the complexity of human nature.<sup>38</sup> Influenced by Schelling and Jacob Böhme, Tillich posits that the constitutive parts of this nature include a demonic element, which psychoanalytic research helped reintroduce into general discourse. Tillich applauds this fact because "wherever the demonic appears there the question as to its correlate, the divine, will also be raised."<sup>39</sup> Psychoanalysis then, despite its general trajectory against the legitimacy of religious beliefs and practices, actually stimulates discussion of these beliefs and practices when it expatiates on the demonic element within the human. Thus, for these reasons, psychoanalysis provides Tillich with another bridge to navigate between the existential vicissitudes of life and the essential character of ontological structure.

This bridge usually appears in the form of accrued knowledge of the self. Tillich appropriates the model of knowledge as "insight" or "gnosis." This insight facilitates self-integration through self-transformation and reunion:

Recently the term 'insight' has been given connotations of *gnosis*, namely, of a knowledge which transforms and heals. Depth psychology attributes healing powers to insight, meaning not a detached knowledge of psychoanalytic theory or of one's own past in the light of this theory but a repetition of one's actual experiences with

all the pains and horrors of such a return. Insight in this sense is a reunion with one's own past...Such a cognitive union produces a transformation just as radical and as difficult as that presupposed and demanded by Socrates and Paul.<sup>40</sup>

This insight, the "reunion with one's past," effects a "radical" transformation because it functions similarly as forgiveness through love: it heals through the "drive towards the unity of the separated."<sup>41</sup> Yet, Tillich distinguishes the disparate natures of these healing encounters so that we comprehend the limited and specific healing within psychotherapy. The "acceptance of the unacceptable" secured through *agape* exists on an ontological level, whereas any denouement through therapy exists on a cognitive and emotional level: "There are striking analogies between the recent methods of mental healing and the traditional ways of personal salvation. But there is also one basic difference. Psychotherapy can liberate one from a special difficulty. Religion shows to him who is liberated, and has to decide about the meaning and aim of his existence, a final way. This difference is decisive for the independence as well as for the co-operation of religion and psychotherapy."<sup>42</sup> Psychotherapy can disclose to an individual the motivation behind and the meaning of his/her actions, and thus help clarify his/her mode in the existential realm of being; religion, however, can disclose the "final" meaning of the interrelation between the existential and essential realms of being.

Tillich further probes this interpenetration between psychoanalysis and religion in the notion of awareness of the distance between essence and existence; thus, existentialism enters the picture. Similar to his reconciliation between ontology and Biblical religion in *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, Tillich contends that the Biblical religion and psychoanalysis share similar conceptions of existential awareness: "The principle of awareness is related to contemporary depth psychology, but it is as old as religion itself and is sharply expressed in the New Testament. It is the principle according to which man in the process of sanctification becomes increasingly aware of his actual situation and of the forces struggling around him and his humanity but also becomes aware of the answers to the questions implied in this situation. Sanctification includes awareness of the demonic as well as of the divine."<sup>43</sup> This awareness of the demonic and divine vis-à-vis the actual situation reiterates Tillich's claim about the affinities between existentialism and psy-

choanalysis. Despite the counterclaims of other thinkers, Tillich argues at length that existentialism and psychoanalysis possess similar sensibilities and have mutually influenced one another in their common exploration of human estranged existence.<sup>44</sup>

The notion of mutual influence between existentialism and psychoanalysis, at first blush, seems easily problematized: to what extent can the radical freedom of existentialism be reconciled with the seeming determinism endemic to psychoanalysis? Tillich believes that such reconciliation is rendered possible because both identify questions arising from human existence. Consequently, existentialism and psychoanalysis merely describe the human situation and ask questions of it without providing the definitive answers. These questions function as critical guides for understanding existence, but they must be correlated with the answers afforded by the ontological dimension of religious faith. Hence, Tillich affirms that it is "[o]nly in the light of an ontological understanding of human nature can the body of material provided by psychology and sociology be organized into a consistent and comprehensive theory of anxiety."<sup>45</sup> This collaborative effort encapsulates the limited, but important contribution of psychoanalysis for understanding the self.

## II. B. Murdoch and Psychoanalysis

While she asserts that she is "not a 'Freudian,'" Murdoch avows the truth of Freudian theory vis-à-vis its construal of "the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control. Introspection reveals only the deep tissue of ambivalent motive, and fantasy is a stronger force than reason. Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings."<sup>46</sup> Murdoch, influenced by Plato's *Timaeus* and Freud's theory of ubiquitous libidinal energy, advocates that the moral life consists of shifting attachments and harnessing energy. Hence, one would deduce that Murdoch would have affinities with psychoanalysis in that she intends to marshal forces to mitigate this natural selfishness.

However, Murdoch admonishes her readers about the consoling perils of psychoanalysis that imply facile answers to complex phenomena. For example, psychoanalysis promotes efforts to retrieve the self through personal narration and mimetic role-playing. Murdoch recognizes the intent of such

practices, but she cautions: “We want to control the tale ourselves and give it *our* ending (which need not of course be in the ordinary sense a happy one). We want to make a move to a conclusion, *our* conclusion.”<sup>47</sup> Hence, Murdoch submits that psychoanalysis optimistically over-determines the transformative powers of certain cognitive and volitional exercises that, as in the writings of the existentialists,<sup>48</sup> simply reinforce egoism; she contends that the relentless ego will not relinquish its reign through exercises focusing on the self. Murdoch maintains that the ego must be displaced, even “shocked,” through concrete attention to the other impelled by images of the Good.<sup>49</sup> Here we can observe a significant divergence between Murdoch and Tillich: while both seek to protect, but ultimately transform the individual, only Tillich embraces the strategies of existentialism and psychoanalysis as plausible means to accomplish this goal (even if in the limited manner as explained in the above discussion).

Moreover, Murdoch castigates psychoanalysis’s reductive tendencies to explain away idiosyncratic character traits such as sense of humor with technical jargon and deterministic categorization. She declares: “Psychoanalysis is a muddled embryonic science, and even if it were not, there is no argument that I know of that can show us that we have got to treat its concepts as fundamental. The notion of an ‘ideal analysis’ is a misleading one.”<sup>50</sup> Another impetus for her scrutiny and dismissal of psychoanalysis derives from its historical bifurcation of fact and value. The systematic subsuming of the inner life of consciousness, convictions, and desires into mechanical compartmentalizations objectifies experience and divests it of its definitively subjective and individual character. Murdoch contends that the paramount problem of the self is and always will be the self, regardless of the scientifically derived causal explanations. She shares this concern with Tillich, for he too censures psychoanalysis’s tendency to reduce the complexity of the human condition—even if it is merely finite freedom—and to disavow the fundamental importance of human brokenness and human transcendence. He writes in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*:

Today psychotherapy (including all schools of psychological healing) often tries to eliminate both medical healing and the healing function of the Spiritual Presence. The first is usually a matter of practice rather than theory, the second mostly a matter of principle. The psychoanalyst, for example, claims that he can overcome the

negativities of man’s existential situation—*anxiety, guilt, despair, emptiness, and so on*. But in order to support his claim the analyst must deny both the existential estrangement of man from himself and the possibility of his transcendent reunion with himself; that is, he must deny the vertical line in man’s encounter with reality.<sup>51</sup>

Let us conclude this section by re-examining the earlier discussion of literature through the lens of the current treatment of psychoanalysis. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur, among others, has argued convincingly that reader and text presents a good analogue for understanding the relationship between analyst and analysand.<sup>52</sup> With minor variations, both models consist of actors and patients whose roles are interchangeable and mutually interpreted; both have objectives as the construction of coherent stories whereby, through the course of narrative, intelligibility of structures and constancy of self are attained. If this analogy holds true, it seems reasonable to assert that Tillich’s subordination of literature and Murdoch’s dismissal of psychoanalysis are untenable. These positions are untenable because they are inconsistent with the internal principles of their own systems.

### III. Concluding Reflections

Our discussion of Tillich and Murdoch has traversed two foci within the matrix of culture, morality, and religion to demonstrate the depth and scope of their writings. Our principally synthetic method noted numerous similarities, and one should not overlook the rather stark analytic differences that distinguish these two interlocutors. Alas, these distinctions will have to be parsed on another occasion; the task of this conclusion is to sharpen the contribution of Murdoch and Tillich to contemporary discussions about the self and post-modern faith formation. These discussions of post-modern faith formation can be incredibly stimulating, but they can also collapse into various extremes that deserve brief mention. On the one hand, the retreat from a divisive world to religious narratives as the exclusive criterion for truth and goodness lacks awareness of the overall spiritual situation and fails to critique itself self-reflexively. On the other hand, the submission to the primordial claims of the other prevents the transcendental affirmation of one’s own being as part of a more significant ontological meaning.<sup>53</sup> Through his analyses of art and psychoanalysis, Til-



lich transcends the narrow parameters of reductive claims to bring forth the essence of self, other, and morality: "True morality is a morality of risk. It is morality which is based on the 'courage to be,' the dynamic self-affirmation of man as man. This self-affirmation must take the threat of non-being, death, guilt, and meaninglessness into itself. It risks itself, and through the courage of risking itself, it wins itself. Moralisms give safety, morality lives in the unsafety of risk and courage."<sup>54</sup> This risk, similar to Murdoch's method of metaphysical pictures coupled with attention to others and the contingencies of life, reflects a realistic awareness of the tensions created in every moment between existential vicissitudes and essential structure. Murdoch and Tillich utilize various symbolic resources to complicate and intensify this awareness; they recognize that their methods must be capacious so as to attend properly to the profundity and complexity of the human condition.

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<sup>1</sup> Space precludes in-depth analysis and comparison of these principal themes. Rather, I emphasize the extent

to which their views of art and psychoanalysis signal distinct presuppositions about the self and its relation to other and to reality. I engage other postmodern thinkers by way of discussions in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> *The Critique of Theological Reason*, 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 226. Mackey's principal retrieval of self and reality derives from a comprehensive metaphysics that has affinities with the Judeo-Christian conception of creation. For further comments on Mackey's book, please see my forthcoming review in *The Journal of Religion*.

<sup>4</sup> *On the Boundary*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> *The Courage to Be*, 147.

<sup>6</sup> For Tillich, symbols function as the organic means by which humans can conceptualize their estranged condition and ultimate reality. Symbols, an extension of the resonance between ontology and epistemology, point beyond themselves toward ultimate concern. On symbols, please see, *inter alia*, *Dynamics of Faith*.

<sup>7</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume 2, 114-115.

<sup>8</sup> "Religion and Secular Culture," in *The Protestant Era*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> "Existential Aspects of Modern Art," in *On Art and Architecture*, ed. by John Dillenberger, 95. Please see also "Protestantism and Artistic Style," in *Theology of Culture*, 68-75.

<sup>10</sup> "Authentic Religious Art," in *On Art and Architecture*, 232.

<sup>11</sup> "The Demonic in Art," in *On Art and Architecture*, 110. In "Protestantism and Artistic Style," 73, Tillich writes: "The ultimate is also present in those experiences of reality in which its negative, ugly, and self-destructive side is encountered." This juxtaposition between the ultimate and ugliness parallels, to some extent, the perspectives of Julia Kristeva, Georges Bataille, and Jacques Lacan on the ambiguity (and even filth) of the sacred.

<sup>12</sup> *Dynamics of Faith*, 76; *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> In *The Religious Situation*, 55, Tillich clarifies this distinction in reference to such paintings: "nowhere does one break through to the eternal, to the unconditioned content of reality which lies beyond the antithesis of subject and object." In *Ibid.*, 57, he also notes a comparison similar to the above: "It is not an exaggeration to ascribe more of the quality of sacredness to a still-life by Cézanne or a tree by van Gogh than to a picture of Jesus by Uhde."

<sup>14</sup> "Art and Society," in *On Art and Architecture*, 18; "Protestantism and Artistic Style," 74; and "Art and Ultimate Reality" (1960), *Main Works*, Vol. 2, Writings in the Philosophy of Culture, 317-332.

<sup>15</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, 258. Autonomous and heteronomous art, by contrast, cannot recognize this same genuine revelation; according to Michael Palmer,

these styles are "forms of literalism" where "[n]either can speak of revelation as the unconditioned import of meaning 'breaking through' the form of meaning" (*Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art*, 156 [original emphasis]; 156).

<sup>16</sup> "Protestantism and Artistic Style," 75.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Boundary*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> For example, he does conjecture that "the influence of literature on the religious situation of a period, by virtue of the superiority of words over lines and colors, is both more direct and more general than is the influence of art" (*The Religious Situation*, 62).

<sup>19</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 323; *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> In "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 342, Murdoch declares that "[i]n the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego."

<sup>21</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 317. Murdoch does not adhere to all of Plato's teaching. She problematizes his "puritan" view toward art, and she redresses his abstract application of *eros* merely to ideas by advocating for the centrality of concrete attention of the other. For Tillich's discussion of the cave allegory and its relation to theonomy, please see, *inter alia*, "Religion and Secular Culture" in *The Protestant Era*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>24</sup> "Against Dryness," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 293.

<sup>25</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 337.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. This destruction of the fallacious self is subsumed within the spiritual journey. Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 282, writes: "But one's theory of art must account for the fact that experience of art is spiritual experience."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. The resonance between Tillich's *Guernica* and Murdoch's views become more apparent when Murdoch suggests: "The endlessly various formal separateness of art makes *spaces* for reflection. To resume: art cannot help, whatever its subject, beautifying and consoling. *Goya's 'horrors of war' are terrifying but beautiful*" (*Ibid.*, 122; my emphasis).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>29</sup> To be sure, Murdoch and Tillich differ on the extent to which "genuine moral effort" by itself can facilitate moral transformation. Nevertheless, it is interesting that both thinkers observe a tension within images that encapsulate the inherent ambiguity within culture, morality, and religion.

<sup>30</sup> One of the ways to navigate Murdoch's rather amorphous text is based on a structural schema: chapters 1-5 discuss image-making, appearances, and art, chapters

6-12 address consciousness and the inner life, and chapters 13-19 contemplate transcendent reality.

<sup>31</sup> “Against Dryness,” 295, and “The Novelist as Metaphysician,” in *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>32</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 97

<sup>33</sup> This derives, in part, from her adherence, *pace* Derrida, to Plato’s concerns about writing and the usurpation of consciousness by the contemporary turn to language. Writing for Murdoch does not function as the divine, say, as it does for Julia Kristeva, who views literature as “taking the place of the sacred” “because it hence decks itself out in the sacred power of horror” (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 208; 208).

<sup>34</sup> Tillich, in the introduction to his *The Religious Situation* 12, defines situation as an “unconscious faith which is not assailed because *it is the presupposition of life and is lived rather than thought of*, this all-determining, final source of meaning constitutes the actual religious situation of a period” (my emphasis).

<sup>35</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 247.

<sup>36</sup> “The Demonic in Art,” 116.

<sup>37</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, 191.

<sup>38</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, 240.

<sup>39</sup> *The Religious Situation*, 32. See also “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis,” in *Theology of Culture*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume I, 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Love, Power, and Justice*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> “Moralisms and Morality: Theonomous Ethics,” in *Theology of Culture*, 143.

<sup>43</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, 231.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Rieff, in his *Freud: The Mind of the Moral-ist*, 96, argues: “Psychoanalysis—at least programmatically—does not aim at achieving a more critical view of the self, as does existentialism, for example, which has sponsored a heightened introspection in order to validate a more negative and critical view of both self and world. Rather psychoanalysis seeks to ease the burden of responsibility and engagement.” For Tillich’s argument to the contrary, please see his “The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis” in *Theology of Culture*, 112-126.

<sup>45</sup> *The Courage to Be*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Murdoch, “On ‘God’ and ‘Good,’” 341. 341 *Inter alia*, Murdoch makes passing references to “our natural sloth, our weariness and covert despair” (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 479).

<sup>47</sup> *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 105 (original emphasis).

<sup>48</sup> Murdoch eschews the existentialists’ focus on radical freedom, the volitional capacities of the will, and

leaps between stages of existence. For Murdoch’s full-length treatment of existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, please see her *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*.

<sup>49</sup> Murdoch does not conceive of psychoanalysis as a form of critique of the ego, which is advocated by thinkers such as Jacques Lacan. Murdoch interestingly does not engage Lacan, most likely because he employs conceptual tools from structuralists and post-structuralists that Murdoch abrogates as obviating consciousness and ordinary truth. She therefore would not accept Lacan’s (Lévi-Straussian influenced) notion that “*the unconscious is structure like a language*” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 20; original emphasis). Lacan’s emphasis on language is further illustrated through the development of conceptual models to depict alienation: “This alienating *or* is not an arbitrary invention, nor is it a matter of *how one sees things*. It is a part of language itself” (*Ibid.*, 212 original emphasis). This linguistically informed model conflicts sharply with Murdoch’s link between vision, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. One can point to a certain resonance concerning Murdoch’s image of shocking the ego and Lacan’s pursuit of the real via the other. However, I submit that Lacan’s notions of “the split, of the stroke, of rupture” (*Ibid.*, 26), analogous to Georges Bataille’s language of sacrifice, differ from Murdoch’s views because they pertain to a radical heterogeneity that while real, is unknowable. By contrast, Murdoch envisions the shock as a shift of conscious attachment from self-obsession to disciplined attention to the other as metaphysically and concretely real: self and other still exist, but as an attenuated self in a different relation to the other. For Murdoch’s account, please see her “M and D” example in “The Idea of Perfection,” in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 312-318, where, contra the behaviorists, she describes the vacillations and moral progression of a mother’s consciousness vis-à-vis her daughter-in-law. I may also note in passing that Tillich would disagree with Lacan’s notions that the unconscious is “*pre-ontological*” as it is “neither being, nor non-being, but the unrealized” (*Ibid.*, 29 original emphasis; 30).

<sup>50</sup> “The Idea of Perfection,” 320.

<sup>51</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, 281.

<sup>52</sup> On this point, please see Ricoeur’s “What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding?” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 268, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 3, 247, and *Freud and Philosophy*, 474. The comparison is not perfect, and Ricoeur does note subtle differences.

<sup>53</sup> I have noted similarities and differences between Murdoch and Tillich and several post-modern thinkers who privilege the other. To be sure, both Murdoch and

Tillich recognize the claims of the other, but these claims are always interpreted within larger structures of meaning (e.g. Tillich's formulation of the ontological polarities including individuation and participation, his construal of self and world as the basic ontological structure, and his notion of reunion through *agape* and Murdoch's contention that the magnetic impulses of the Good illuminate the goodness of individual beings and compel concrete attention to the other). They do not exclude notions of embodiment or affectivity, but these formulations differ, say, from Emmanuel Levinas's lordship of the other (with the

self as hostage) or Kristeva's presentation of the abject as "the jettisoned object, [which] is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (*Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, 2). Murdoch and Tillich propose that the meanings of self, other, and world cohere in moments that, while fragmentary, provide glimpses of the underlying meaning of being (ontology) and goodness (metaphysics) where a residual element of self remains.

<sup>54</sup> "Moralisms and Morality: Theonomous Ethics," 141.

**HOW DOES THE LETTER KILL?  
THE TILlichIAN AND LUTHERAN  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF LAW**

**Kimberly R. Miller**

Editor's Note: This is the *Newsletter's* annual student paper. Kimberly R. Miller is a student at Yale Divinity School. This paper, written for a course taught by Professor David Kelsey, was chosen by Professor Kelsey as the most outstanding in his class. The editor is grateful to Professor Kelsey for his selection of this paper for the *Newsletter*.

In an autobiographical essay, Paul Tillich wrote, "I, myself, belong to Lutheranism by birth, education, religious experience, and theological reflection. I have never stood on the borders of Lutheranism and Calvinism. The substance of my religion is and remains Lutheran."<sup>1</sup> Although Tillich was by no means a confessional Lutheran theologian, he incorporated many Lutheran themes in the development of his constructive position, including justification by faith, the two kingdoms, and the *sola gratia* principle. Tillich also translates the traditional Lutheran claim that the law neither saves nor justifies: it neither reunites our essential with our actual being nor gives us unambiguous life. Only by being accepted—only by grace—do human beings receive unambiguous life. On first glance, then, Tillich's theology of law seems quite Lutheran in substance.

A closer examination of Tillich's view of law, however, suggests that assessing its Lutheran character is more complicated. Traditional Lutheran theology, while maintaining the *sola gratia*

principle, has allowed the law to have a positive significance for human beings—both for those who are "old beings," living under sin, and those who are reborn. By contrast, Tillich makes little allowance for a positive use of law. Under the conditions of actual existence, the law only oppresses. Under the Spiritual Presence, human beings are increasingly free from the law; in fact, the law disappears. Tillich does permit a theological use of the law, but his understanding of the law's convicting and unmasking power is much weaker than that of Lutheran theology.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Tillich's theology of law in light of a standard Lutheran view. For this "standard Lutheran view," I rely on the *Book of Concord*, the collection of confessional documents Lutherans accept as normative. I begin by observing how and why Lutherans view law as a fundamental good for human beings. I then explore Tillich's position, comparing and contrasting it with the Lutheran model. Finally, I conclude with some reflections the core theological and anthropological assumptions at stake in the debate.

Before beginning, however, I would like to say a word about why I am undertaking this topic at the present time. A debate currently rages among Lutheran theologians about theology of law and the relationship between law and Christian freedom.<sup>2</sup> Within this debate, David Yeago and Reinhard Hütter portray Tillich (along with other post-Kantian Lutheran thinkers) as a modern antinomian. As I will show in this essay, this claim has some basis. I am less certain whether Lutherans should adopt Yeago and Hütter's proposed solution to this antinomian trend, a solution that draws in part upon character and virtue ethics and the recovery of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. In my estimation, it is worth ask-