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Realistic Living

DREAMING INNOCENCE IN AMERICA: PAUL TILLICH'S
RADICAL THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

One of the challenges of liberation theology is to think of the radical political and social liberation of the oppressed in a way that is truly this-worldly. This challenge is already clearly apparent in Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* in 1972, which insists on starting from "facts and questions derived from the world" in order "to be part of a process through which the world is transformed."¹ In the tension between being fully in the world and radically refusing the system of oppression and exploitation that not only troubles the word but in every meaningful sense *is* the world as it is, liberation theology reclaims the tension of the early Jesus movement's focus on the eschatological "kingdom of God."

Liberation theology has largely sought to contribute to this as a "critical reflection" not entirely from within it, but by juxtaposing it to "the Word accepted in faith."² Although liberation theologians do not interpret the Word in the crude sense of a kind of Biblicism or fundamentalism, they do look to criteria (for instance, Boff's "brotherhood, justice, liberation, and goodness"),³ that are 'intuited' to point to ways that existing conditions contradict "the divine plan."⁴

The Word itself for what can now be regarded as "classical" liberation theology is received within the hermeneutical circle, as Segundo outlines it in the first chapter of *The Liberation of Theology*.⁵ Within this circle, the Biblical text occupies one pole of a bipolar process with four stages. These two poles are (1) profound and enriching questions and suspicions about current reality and (2) profound and enriching interpretations of the Bible.⁶ The second pole is linked to, though not exhausted by, a certain static element, linked to divine revelation.

Segundo's sophisticated and incisive analysis in this book surrounds that static element with a dynamism on all sides, since

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A theology of liberation: history, politics, and salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 10-11.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ Leonardo Boff, *A vida religiosa e a Igreja no processo de libertação*, 2. ed., *Vida religiosa: Temas atuais 1*. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1976).

⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Teologia do cativo e da libertação*, 2a. ed., *Publicações CID Teologia*. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980), 3.

⁵ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1976).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

acceptance of the revelatory quality of what Sorbino calls “the deposit of faith” depends on a prior commitment, or option, made in the midst of a life that, echoing Kierkegaard by way of Camus, can only be lived forward and cannot be seen from an objective, transhistorical perspective. This commitment precedes and motivates the reception of revelatory content itself, and this revelatory content, once accepted, continues to be interpreted in light of the option that is being lived by the individual or community doing the interpretation.

Segundo’s supercessionist, but anti-Marcionite, interpretation of the Hebrew Bible leads him to extend the circle, not just to Biblical interpretation, but to the Biblical witness itself.⁷ Nevertheless, in Segundo’s account and “classical” liberation theology in general, revelatory content or “transcendent data” are contained in the witness as a whole: “transcendent data offered by God penetrate into the corresponding questions that arise within the whole of human experience.”⁸

Paul Tillich’s theological circle has a similar static pole: ultimately the Bible is the original testimony to the event of Jesus as the Christ.⁹ Though in Tillich, this is qualified because the church is the source of that Biblical witness and not the other way around,¹⁰ and the church itself is situated within a broader revelatory context that includes the history of religion and culture as a whole.¹¹ This latter context, which Tillich took up with enthusiasm at different points in his life and to which his dialogue with Buddhism represents a return toward the end of his life, was left uncompleted by him.

This article argues that Tillich’s concept of “Dreaming Innocence,” as a poetic expression of the reality to which the Biblical myth of pre-lapsarian paradise points, reflects a lingering nostalgia for just the kind of transcendent data that would be unsullied by the world and its conflicts and provide a criterion for liberatory theory and praxis when joined with concrete historical forms of oppression and exploitation. Nevertheless, Tillich’s development of this concept in the context of his theological work darkens Dreaming Innocence to such a degree that it raises questions about the appropriateness of any transcendent datum whatsoever beyond the ontological self-transcendence that, for him, is as ultimately real as it gets.

The image of a prelapsarian “innocence” becomes a rhetorical device that anchors political and cultural practice to what is ultimately a Western colonialist norm that he explicitly rejects.

⁷ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 244.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 34-35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

Tillich's development of the concept of Dreaming Innocence can inform emancipatory practice, but only if we allow the other side of the Western colonial experience to critically address not only the interpretation of Western religion and culture, but Western religion and culture itself.

Whatever else it may be, Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* is a quintessentially and paradoxically American text. It is especially so in its treatment of the transition from essence to existence, and the Dreaming Innocence that "precedes" that transition. It is so both directly – Tillich considered it his 'gift' to his adopted country – and indirectly, rooted as it is in Schelling's work during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the latter's incorporation of Enlightenment period American contact narratives into his myth of the Fall. Tillich's development of the concept of Dreaming Innocence as a myth with an ambiguous allure causes it to function critically against both conservative and revolutionary politics.

Nevertheless, the preservation of a notion of innocence against the background of a conflictual reality, which is composed of bipolar forces in tension, a background that all the way into Tillich's presentation of divinity, places Tillich within a theological legacy that itself evades and recoils from the de-centering power of the kind of origin that America represents and that its tales of itself conceal. I suggest that this de-centering power, rather than Dreaming Innocence, is the appropriate starting-point for an American myth of origin that articulates the demand of the empirical others, expelled and exploited by the Dreaming Innocence that fuels American utopian efforts.

The *Systematic Theology* is quintessentially American because it does not simply repeat or translate the body of work that Tillich had already undertaken in a different language and a different place. Tillich's American work is re-orientation and a departure. There are two very important differences between Tillich's German (1910-1930) and American (1945-1964) literary output that can illustrate this. First, the German output was deeply and often explicitly engaged with the *Identitätsphilosophie* that sustained his scholarly focus through two dissertations on Schelling (1910 and 1912) and a post-doctoral work that was almost rejected because it assumed the principles of *Identitätsphilosophie* rather than questioning or contextualizing them historically.¹²

While his American output continues to draw heavily on this tradition, it is less concerned with the detailed analysis of philosophical texts in that tradition that, in the German period, helped fuel the genesis of his own "system." His American

¹² Schüßler Werner (2008). "Tillich's Life and Works." In Russell Manning, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich* (Cambridge Companions to Religion) (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Kindle Edition.

students who, as Tillich later observed, “have the feeling that they start something new,” preferred to wonder at his originality than to engage the texts that incited his own wonder, and he accommodated them while patiently attempting to draw those he could to these earlier thinkers.¹³

His books of sermons so expertly hid their philosophical underpinnings from the reader that Henry Sloane Coffin – on whose professional assistance Tillich relied after his arrival in America but who had made plain his aversion to philosophy in general – and Schelling in particular, praised the “Christian quality.”¹⁴

Second, after the First World War, the German output was explicitly engaged in politics. The American output, on the other hand, shied away from any overtly political theology. This output, it should be noted, is concentrated in the period after the war. When Tillich first arrived at Union in 1933, he started almost from scratch, with no savings, in an insecure and precariously funded teaching position, and with limited knowledge of English. From then until 1948, he was involved in anti-Nazi German language radio broadcasts, refugee resettlement and assistance, and was an outspoken antifascist and socialist among German refugee friends and acquaintances. It is fair to say that his focus in those years was on antifascist activity.

At the same time, his intense consciousness of his own émigré status, manifesting at times on an insistence that he was being watched,¹⁵ caused him to shun political parties himself or any mass movement that might cast him as a foreign threat and to advise other émigrés to do the same.¹⁶ His lack of familiarity with the American political scene and Coffin’s advice to stay clear of it caused him to tread much more carefully. Finally, in 1945, Tillich’s service as chair of the centrist, but contentious, Council for a Democratic Germany got him blacklisted by the U.S. Army. In 1948, he wrote about a “sacred void” and about the loss of the time of the *kairos*, a key concept in his political theology.

This is paradoxically American because, more than any of his other American work, it showcases a continuity with his earlier German work. Indeed, an attentive reading of Tillich’s dissertations on Schelling indicate that the major themes of the *Systematic Theology*, including static and dynamic polarities, the forces making up the Trinity, the dark ground of being, and the interpretations of myth and revelation, are already articulated there in his Schelling scholarship. Many of these concepts are also at work in his political essays and in *The Socialist Decision*, which are motivated by a political struggle in solidarity with the

¹³ Wilhelm Pauck and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 168-169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

workers' revolutionary struggle and against political romanticism.

In these works, Tillich focuses on a polarity between political romanticism founded in an origin myth and bourgeois liberalism founded on eschatology, rationalization, and autonomy. Reading the *ST* through these earlier dissertations illuminates what is at stake politically and philosophically in the former so that the *ST*, though American, becomes a decidedly German text. At the same time, the ease that Tillich had acquired in relating complex philosophical concepts to experiences with which his pragmatic American readers could connect means that reading the dissertations through the *ST* also increases their accessibility to readers who, as he said of his students by way of contrasting them with their German counterparts, "feel that they start something new." This should not be surprising, since Tillich began work on the *ST* in Germany early in his career.

Nevertheless, the *ST* alienated American theological colleagues as the sermons did not, partly because of its account of the doctrines of creation and fall. Reinhold Niebuhr became the first of many to criticize Tillich's identification of creation and fall, which he argued ontologized the historical and robbed it of moral significance.¹⁷ Coffin, after praising Tillich's sermons, expressed dismay at the first volume of the *ST* because he thought it confirmed his worst fears about Tillich: that he was not a Christian but a philosophical mystic.¹⁸

Tillich's account of the Fall, his account of the state of Adam before the Fall as "dreaming innocence," and his ontology of self-separation and unity-in-difference through the free renunciation of selfhood, not only point back, both to the political and philosophical concerns of his German period, but also, through his appropriation of Schelling's philosophical approach to myth, to a trajectory that links him to a record of a sustained encounter in the late 18th century between the Enlightenment naturalist and soldier Felix de Azara and "wild" inhabitants of the Rio de la Plata in which the question of the universality of religion exposed Schelling and, through him, Tillich and ourselves to a certain shock and a certain task and promise beyond nostalgia for "dreaming innocence," or of a liberation in the self-transparency of the crucified self.

For Tillich, the Garden of Eden story points to a state that he calls "dreaming innocence." Dreaming Innocence is not a natural state but, rather, an essential being. Tillich says that not even nature is innocent.¹⁹ Dreaming Innocence is not located in space and time

¹⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Biblical Thought and Ontological Speculation in Tillich's Theology," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, eds. Kegley, Charles and Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 225.

¹⁸ Pauck and Pauck, 176.

¹⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 43.

at all, since everything in space and time is subject to the categories, which are the conditions of existence and thus already separated from essence, or potentiality. Because of this, Tillich declares that “there is a point in which creation and Fall coincide.”

This point is “creaturely freedom.” “Creaturely freedom” belongs to all creatures inasmuch as they are creatures, inasmuch as they are both “rooted in the creative ground” and actualizing themselves “through freedom” in relationship to that ground.²⁰ The fulfillment of creaturely freedom is “a break between existence and essence,” a “separation from the creative ground.”

This break is not just what separates nature from culture, but also what divides nature from its own ground, its own essence. There is no absolute discontinuity between “animal bondage” and “human freedom” so that “it is impossible to say” how a nature “qualitatively different from animal nature” emerged from nature.²¹ “The element of destiny” in nature, the unconscious “in its determining power,” “bodily and psychic strivings” are active in “what appears as conscious reason in a centered decision.” Sociality and ideology are also “effective in every individual decision” as “the universe works through us.”

So, is undisturbed union with the ground of being, then, the location of Dreaming Innocence? It would not seem so, since this break between essence and existence “is itself an expression of the polarity between freedom and destiny *in* the ground of being.” It would be more appropriate, then, to characterize Dreaming Innocence as a *disturbed* union rather an undisturbed one. The Fall is a repetition of creation, which is itself a repetition and radicalization of the relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity, God as “inexhaustible ground” and “power of being,” in tension with God as “meaning and structure,” which Tillich affirms as “God’s self-objectification,”²² and this, moreover, repeats the aforementioned tension within the ground of being itself.

Dreaming Innocence is a state of pure potentiality. Although in volume I of the *ST*, Tillich says that the state of the human before the fall “transcends potentiality and actuality,”²³ but in volume II, he seems to withdraw this suggestion, saying instead that it “has potentiality, not actuality.”²⁴ But this is not a simple withdrawal. Although Dreaming Innocence has “no place” and “no time,” it is “dreaming” inasmuch as it is “real and non-real at the same time” and inasmuch as it “anticipates the actual.” Dreaming looks forward to waking life, and in this way Dreaming Innocence includes the actual by way of anticipation.

²⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 256.

²¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 42.

²² Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 251.

²³ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 33.

So much for the dreaming, but what is at stake in the innocence? Tillich answers that Dreaming Innocence is “innocent” inasmuch as it lacks the *experience, responsibility, and guilt* that every actual event entails but nevertheless has them before it as a possibility. So, this state is that of pure potentiality anticipating the actual, but lacking experience, responsibility, and guilt. But Tillich, an avid reader of Freud, knew that the dreaming state is not directly accessible to the waking state and only appears there in a fragmented, distorted way.

So, he says that Dreaming Innocence can appear to us “only in existential distortion.”²⁵ Nothing in existence, nothing that stands out against a background, is in a state of dreaming innocence, not even newborn infants, trees, or rocks. “‘Adam before the Fall’ and ‘nature before the curse’ are states of potentiality. They are not actual states.”²⁶ So, the reality of Dreaming Innocence is a problematic reality. Tillich does not reduce the real to the actual (see below), but imagining a real state without actuality, even one that is unreal at the same time, is to say the least to take on a formidable task.

Dreaming Innocence, then, is not a past state of actual human beings or a past state of any being. It is the memory of an absolute past that never was, but which is necessary to imagine in order to make sense of the gap that divides self and world, and self and self. Dreaming Innocence lacks actuality, experience, responsibility, and guilt, but what does it *have* that would make it play a part in the concerns of an existing human being or community? Tillich tells us that Dreaming Innocence is “an image of the state of essential being in which the motifs (the polarities driving to the transition from essence to existence, potentiality to actuality) are working.”²⁷ It is “a stage of infancy before contest and decision.”

Here, what it seems to offer is a vision of peace, in which the polarities that make up existence are not in conflict with each other. Nevertheless, this “stage of infancy,” this working together of the motifs, must go because “the goodness of man’s created nature” itself is just the possibility “and *necessity*” (italics mine) of actualizing what he is “in spite of the estrangement unavoidably connected” with this move. Thus, “the state of dreaming innocence drives beyond itself.”

Therefore, Dreaming Innocence or “mere potentiality” is not perfection, the latter being rather a “conscious union of existence and essence.” So, the peace that Dreaming Innocence seems to offer is a strange kind of peace: a dissatisfied, restless peace that moves inexorably (the “necessity” of actualization in humanity’s created goodness) toward what will have destroyed it. Experience, responsibility and guilt come with decision, and the

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 33.

potentiality that *Dreaming Innocence is*, is a potentiality for decision, or anxiety.

In the *ST*, Tillich refers to Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, itself visibly influenced by Schelling's account of anxiety in God,²⁸ to talk about what within dreaming innocence already drives toward its loss. Anxiety is nonbeing experienced "from the inside."²⁹ Anxiety "belongs to the created character of being quite apart from estrangement and sin," and "it is actual in 'Adam' (i.e., man's essential nature) as well as in 'Christ' (i.e., man's new reality)."³⁰

Despite the considerable tendency toward separation that anxiety represents and the absence of a clear line that would separate necessity from decision, "an act in which all the drives and influences which constitute the destiny of man are brought into the centered unity" is still possible. This act is freedom.³¹ Where the possibility of such an act appears, guilt is also possible and thus, so is innocence. Since nature cannot perform such an act except in humanity, only humanity of all nature can be said to "have been" innocent.

Innocence is the recounted dream of the guilty existing – awakened – human being. "There was no utopia in the past, just as there will be no 'utopia' in the future. Actualized creation and estranged existence are identical." Nevertheless, Tillich adds in explicit reply to Niebuhr, "the point of coincidence of creation and the Fall" is "not a logical coincidence."³²

The transition to existence and actuality is not entailed in essence and potentiality, despite the "necessity" of humanity to realize the potential to act that is part of its created goodness; thus, universally and for each conscious actor, the transition is "a leap" and not "a structural necessity." The "leap" character, for Tillich, expresses his conviction – again, echoing Schelling – that one cannot start with an analysis of being and derive existence from it.

One can imagine an eternal tension between polarity of essence and existence, of potentiality and actuality – ultimately, as we have seen, in God or Reality itself and not just in humanity – that is never resolved into one or the other. To imagine this, however, is to imagine nothing, not to imagine a more perfect world. But the recounted dream of innocence and the guilty existence are not explanations for something more primordial: they are "the original fact."³³

²⁸ Schüßler, loc. 43.

²⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 193.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³² *Ibid.*, 44.

³³ *Ibid.*

The point of coincidence between creation and Fall is the free decision for actual existence, which entails a cut in potentiality. It presupposes a bipolar unity of consciousness and what is not conscious in the divine itself, so that God's self-expression is both as the expression of an unconditioned, inexpressible ground of being and an "indivisible remainder" or fracture within the structure of being that is the expressed itself.

For Tillich, God cannot be thought of as a highest person. His "diagnosis" of the "personal God" error locates it in the Kantian "separation of nature ruled by physical law" (rooted in the theoretical use of reason) from "personality ruled by moral law" (rooted in the practical use of reason).³⁴ After Kant's rejection of traditional ontological and cosmological proofs and his advancement of an argument for the necessity of positing God in order to reconcile the maxim of moral freedom and responsibility with the causal necessity theoretical reason detects in nature, God, says Tillich, was placed on the side of the moral law, making God "a heavenly, completely perfect person" who resides "above" the world.

This passage points back to Tillich's second dissertation. There, he articulates the developments in German idealism leading up to Schelling's break with it and the latter's subsequent proto-existentialism. These developments culminated in an attempt to identify the idea of God as the demand of reason for a reconciliation between two principles in practical reason.

As Tillich argues in the second dissertation, Kant views consciousness as "nothing but the act of synthesis of the manifold" – the structured uniting of a sensory multiplicity – by means of the "forms of comprehension" he calls the understanding.³⁵ Subjectivity is this unity, objectivity is this manifold, and truth is their identity. There is, however, no single perfect synthesis but rather "particular acts of the synthesizing consciousness."³⁶

Consciousness must synthesize because it just is the act of synthesis, but its own particularity appears among the manifold it must synthesize. Consciousness must attend to its own position in space and time and to the irreducible blindness that comes along with that positionality, and this prompts Kant to introduce the "boundary concept of the "thing in itself." The "thing in itself" is a boundary concept because it cannot be a part of the synthesis and cannot be said to cause either the phenomena of experience or the structuring synthesis that constructs and unifies them by means of the concepts of the understanding, since causality itself is among those concepts.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁵ Paul Tillich, *Mysticism and Guilt Consciousness in Schelling's Philosophical Development* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1974), 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Tillich asserts that the “thing in itself” appears in the first Critique as what resists the rational, as the “irrational hypostasized” and the “focal point of all the irrational moments in the development of Idealism.”³⁷ It is against the “thing in itself” that the traditional proofs for the existence of God collide. Although the ontological proof can lead reason to the idea of an absolute essence, being in itself, it cannot establish the existence of such an essence.

The idea of the unconditioned is presupposed by the conditioned nature of everything in experience: our acts of synthesis order the phenomena of experience in a series of dependencies, but this series collapses without an unconditioned to ground it.³⁸ So we search in existence for that which “in its concept contains a therefore for every wherefore.”³⁹ We decide to take for granted an *ens realissimum*, a most real being, because our synthesizing activity demands it in order to risk the act of synthesis. If we go further, however, and think we have proven the existence of such a most real being, we forget that “the unconditioned necessity of judgments is not the same as the absolute necessity of things.”⁴⁰

As Tillich puts it, “there is no way that leads from there back to existence and to the conditioned, for the *via causalitatis* is blocked.”⁴¹ Ontological and cosmological starting-points are ideas, not objects of experience, not existing things. Tillich says that Kant’s distinction between the idea of essence and actual existence “is one of the most consequential for the development of philosophy.”

For Tillich, Kant’s critique of the “intelligent design” argument “occupies a peculiar position” because it anticipates the *Critique of Judgment*’s analysis of the experience of natural beauty, which for Kant relies on reason’s attribution of purposiveness to nature.⁴² The core of that argument’s elaboration in Kant’s third critique foregrounds aesthetic judgment that “looks toward the harmony of the universal rules of the understanding and the sensuous particular and finds in this identity the principle of beauty.”⁴³ But this argument forgets the sublime, experienced in “the overwhelming oppressive power of the object.”⁴⁴

This experience involves a “subjection of the senses” and a corresponding “feeling of repulsion,” followed by a feeling of pleasure as theoretical (mathematical sublime) or practical (dynamic sublime) reason works to overcome this subjection. But

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁸ Tillich, *The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling’s Positive Philosophy* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1974), A585.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, A586.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, A594.

⁴¹ Tillich, *Mysticism*, 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

in spite of this last move, the experience of the sublime points to “a conflict between sensibility and reason” that resists the synthesis of natural purposiveness in the experience of organic beauty as purposiveness collides with the inorganic sublime.⁴⁵

Kant’s own attempt to provide a proof for the necessity of an idea of God rests finally on practical reason. Autonomy and freedom are the two maxims of practical reason, derived solely from reason itself. Freedom is “the independence of reason from material motives that lie outside of its self-determination,” so that its only law is the law of its own being.⁴⁶ Autonomy is freedom in the negative sense (e.g., the absence of constraint), and practical reason’s intrinsic legislation (the categorical imperative) is freedom in the positive sense, though it is nothing other than the expression of reason’s autonomy. But since “in every individual it is the nature of reason to be supra-individual,” rational beings can rationally decide to substitute their own individual autonomy for the legislation that derives from reason’s general autonomy.

This is radical evil, the opposition of freedom to itself, and as Tillich observes, Kant insists that “all men” have made this decision against reason.⁴⁷ The “sensible, material incentives of the will,” though indifferent in themselves, become sin when they “come into contradiction with reason and dissolve its identity.” In order to rescue freedom from the fracture that is the conflict between the rational being’s highest good (happiness) and the highest good demanded by the universal self-legislating power that makes of that being a conscious experiencer and actor (a grasper and a shaper), Kant posits God as a “subjective necessity.”

This necessity assures the acting subject that its obedience to reason’s categorical imperative will not have been a useless gesture even if it runs up against the causal chain of events in a way that results in the suffering and death of the happiness-seeking free being. God must be posited because God harmonizes the demands of reason with this causal chain in such a way as to lead eventually to the reconciliation of happiness and virtue. Thus, for Kant, God “remains an object in relation to the thinking subject, a thing, even though thinking and willing are ascribed to him,” and this posited God does not draw reason beyond itself so that the affirmation of this God “is without the force of truth.”⁴⁸ Autonomous reason “is certain only of itself, of its own autonomous legislation.”

What remained largely implicit in Kant was rendered explicit in Fichte, namely the unity of the free moral legislator and the transcendental unity of apperception as the conscious reason from which both freedom and nature derive. As Tillich argues, this is Schelling’s starting-point. The Kantian “‘thing in itself,’

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

'radical evil,' and 'the inorganic' (the sublime)" shatter the Kantian system as Schelling's work develops.⁴⁹ These three instances of reason's irrationality challenge the coherence of theoretical reason, practical reason, and judgment respectively, and point to a Real that resists reason, that cannot be posited by a rational free subject and cannot be escaped.

This Real, unlike the Kantian-Fichtean God, is simultaneously included in and excluded from its own ontology. Its referent is that which is known by its very contradictory appearance in the self-world structure to be other than idea, other than concept. It is the irrational in experience despite experience's own reliance on a reasoning synthesis that pits theoretical and practical reason's *a priori* assumptions against themselves and each other. Essence, known only through the traces the subject leaves in existence as it synthesizes and acts, as it grasps and shapes, cannot be found in existence and is continually disrupted by existence.

For Tillich, this disruption is as fatal to Kant's God as it is constitutive of Schelling's God and his own. Tillich's "ground of being," which is also an "unground" or abyss, is a repudiation of Kantian theology based on what it reveals about the failure to establish an identity that will successfully hold the elements of experience together in a coherent unity.

In the *Systematic Theology*, Tillich follows his own earlier analysis of Schelling's work and identifies the resistance to free deciding subjectivity with the first person of the Trinity and with Schelling's first potency. Tillich rejects the notion that God is *actus purus*, in Whom every potentiality is also actual. For Tillich, a God Who was pure actuality would be dead. God is living only inasmuch as God is both potentiality and actuality. Tillich cites both Bohme's "nature in God" and Schelling's "first potency" in defense of his notion that God is the dynamic tension between actuality and potentiality.⁵⁰

God's dynamism is the source of divine creativity. As potentiality, it includes a "not yet" as well as an "already." Tillich calls potentiality "the negative element in the ground of being which is overcome as negative in the process of being itself." Thus, he says, God is no closer to consciousness than to the unconscious. God carries within Godself that in Godself which is not God. In human beings, this element is not overcome and remains "effective as a threat and a potential disruption."⁵¹ This element is opposed to form, again following Tillich's own understanding of Schelling. Tillich refuses to subordinate God's will to God's reason.

For Tillich, this means that God's dynamic, creative, but ultimately blind self-transcendence is not subordinated to its

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁰ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 246.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

expression in structure, reason, and form. Tillich argues that for over a century, “a decision has been made in favor of the dynamic element.” Tillich thinks this decision agrees more with the Bible, where God’s freedom encompasses what appear as surprising and arbitrary events, than does Kant’s. This dynamic element is God’s *aseity*, God’s self-derivation, but self-derivation also implies unconditionedness, irresistible, resisting, up-againstness. “A conditioned God is no God.”⁵² But as reflection on this concept shows, God’s freedom runs up against itself with questions like whether God could choose to be free or whether his freedom is his destiny.

Tillich’s answer seems to be “yes,” since here he shifts from an ontological to an epistemological perspective, saying that humanity’s ultimate concern does not depend on humanity or on any other finite being or concern. The term used throughout the rest of the *Systematic Theology* to refer to this self-transcending dynamism that resists actuality, strangely since it is associated with dynamism and potentiality rather than with act, is “power.”

As Clayton Crockett argues in his *Interstices of the Sublime*,⁵³ Tillich’s interpretation of Schelling’s *Weltalter* correctly reads Schelling as saying that the first potency is the creative power of God, and not simply, as Slavoj Žižek would read it, God’s self-enclosure. Self-enclosure is an entailment of self-transcendence, an entailment that correlates with the form or structure that becomes actual in self-transcendence. As creativity generates form, creativity resists final form, and this dynamism is precisely what we are up against when we are up against up-againstness.

God’s self-enclosure is an image of this secondary up-againstness of the first potency in Schelling and the First Person in Tillich. The Second Person, described as “meaning and structure,” is the eternal expression of the first. The Second Person is experienced as reality’s quasi-stability. Without it, the First Person “would be chaos, burning fire,” not creative ground. It would also be “absolute seclusion,” Luther’s “naked absolute,” and demonic. The Spirit is the force that unites ground with meaning, power with structure, the First Person with the Second.

As potentiality that is actual only in anticipation, Dreaming Innocence, like Holy Spirit, is located in the tension between dynamism and form, in potentiality emerging in one of nature’s processes and poised to act, tempted to act, but not expressing its own finite potentiality in a definite act. The state to which it points not only cannot be found in nature, inasmuch as nature itself is already subject to the tragic, conflictual result of the separation of potentiality and actuality, but is finally found in a divine reality itself in eternal, almost unbearable, tension. A strange dream indeed, and an even stranger innocence.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 248.

⁵³ Clayton Crockett, *Interstices of the Sublime: Theology and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 97-116.

Dreaming Innocence in Political Expectation: The Socialist Decision

This understanding of the Trinity, grounded as it is in Tillich's close reading of German idealist philosophy, underlies Tillich's arguments in *The Socialist Decision* about the myth of origin, the bourgeois principle, and the socialist principle. In the introduction to the book that was to play a momentous role in his life, the German Tillich argues that any discussion of politics must begin with humanity's dual nature. In this book, Tillich argues that humanity is a life-process that questions itself and its environment and, thus, is not one with itself. Human self-consciousness makes humans "internally dualized" as nature is not.

Political theory must proceed from the conditions in which political thought is rooted, and not be derived "from purely mental processes."⁵⁴ It must take account of "drives and interests," of "pressures and aspirations." In this political work, Tillich is invoking what appears as the dynamic up-againstness of the *Systematic Theology*, and as the "first potency" in the two dissertations on Schelling. Moreover, he argues, political theory must also take account of the fact that even "the most primitive emotional drive is shaped by consciousness."⁵⁵ Here Tillich is invoking the meaning and structure discussed in the *Systematic Theology*, and the "second potency" of Schelling. Humanity "arises out of being and at the same time determines it." Human thrownness (Tillich cites Heidegger explicitly on this) implies the human question of "whence?" This question is addressed primordially in myth – the only kind of myth, since every myth is a myth of origin.⁵⁶

Human beings experience themselves as "posited" before they experience themselves as positing. The origin is creative. The myth of origin tells us how it is that reality "brings us forth as something new and singular, but it takes us, as such, back to the origin again." The dimension of experience that corresponds to the myth of origin is for Tillich "the root of all conservative and romantic thought in politics." But human beings also experience themselves "in existence," which for them includes the experience of "a demand that frees them from being simply bound to what is given, and which compels them to add to the question 'whence?' the question 'whither?'"⁵⁷

The demand is a demand "for something that does not yet exist but should exist." The being who experiences the demand knows that it involves "more than a mere development of what already is" and is "directed toward what ought to be." Therefore, "the question 'whither' is not contained within the limits of the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

question 'whence?' It is something unconditionally new that transcends what is new and what is old within the sphere of mere development."

The unconditional demand "that something unconditionally new should be realized through oneself" breaks the myth of origin. This "is the root of liberal, democratic, and socialist thought in politics."⁵⁸ If the break with the myth of origin marks the difference between conservative, romantic thought and liberal thought, the break with metaphysical harmony marks the difference between liberal bourgeois thought and the socialist principle. Liberal bourgeois thought "believes in a metaphysical harmony which is certain to prevail in the historical process," and is confident that "nature is knowable and can be put into the service of humanity because the categories of the human mind are the elements that give nature its structure."⁵⁹

The bourgeois revolution of 1848 "attempted to free all strata of society from the bonds of origin, both spiritually and materially, by raising the idea of progress to the status of an ontological and ethical principle." The bourgeois principle relied on the belief in harmony and progress, so that "if the belief in harmony is shaken, the bourgeois principle is shaken." And it has been shaken. Tillich's earlier analysis of Kant in the second dissertation had already recounted its philosophical unraveling, and his interpretations of Fall, Creation, and Divine self-transcendence emerge from that unraveling. Here he discusses its social unraveling. Not only is it the case that "the bourgeois belief in harmony and in progress stands in total contradiction to the proletarian situation,"⁶⁰ but even the bourgeoisie and the proletariat must forge alliances with the powers of origin in order to win elections.

Moreover, socialist neglect of the powers of origin is naïve, since it must oppose the bourgeois principle but has nothing in itself from which to forge a positive vision of the future. Its demand is the demand for the new that fuels the bourgeois principle, but it lacks the latter's belief in harmony, the belief that lends to it the conviction that its actions are in accord with nature or its God. It has an ontology of conflict and an ethics of hope, and these are in conflict. But Tillich notes that this is only apparently true, because inasmuch as socialism emerges from the historically and socially located struggle of the proletariat, it is rooted in a cultural past, in a particular myth of origin, which is the Christian myth. It is a myth of humanity breaking with the origin in response to the demand, and of reconciliation through the actualization of the demand in a way that is transparent to the power of origin - theonomous justice.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

In Tillich's retelling of the Adam myth in *The Socialist Decision*, *Dreaming Innocence* belongs to the powers of origin, to the conservative, romantic politics of National Socialism. But Tillich warns against a simple rejection of the powers of origin and the state of *Dreaming Innocence*, or essence.

Socialism, if it is to actualize its own vision of justice, must do so from out of the givenness of its situation and the imaginable possibilities accessible to it in that realm. It has the advantage of rejecting bourgeois harmony and recognizing the tension that characterizes existence. It must also recognize the givenness that empowers its effort to actualize the demand. In the concept of the *kairos*, Tillich seeks to preserve both political expectation as eternal unactualized potentiality and as expectation for specific concrete radical change in a given situation, "a definite content of expectation" emerging from and pertinent to "a particular time."⁶¹

In the fourth and final lecture of Tillich's 1951 series on the political meaning of utopia,⁶² delivered half a decade after his declaration that the time of *kairos* had passed us by, Tillich stands by his earlier assessment of the *kairos* concept by way of a kind of political autobiography. He begins with the return from World War I to a German homeland where a conservative Lutheran transcendental utopia was in conflict with utopian socialism, an immanent utopia. "Socialism had won the revolution because the forces of the conservatives had been disorganized or destroyed by the War."⁶³ Lutheranism, the "Protestant majority," adopted a negative stance toward any social utopia.

Tillich and other colleagues' wartime experiences and reflections convinced them that "a utopia of simply going forward did not grasp the human situation in its finitude and estrangement" and that an exclusively transcendent utopia "cannot be an expression of the New Being." They decided that "in the horizontal dimension something can happen, something new, something realizable here and now, under present circumstances and conditions, with the possibilities given to us" and that "we must go forward in order to see these possibilities and convert them into reality."⁶⁴ They discerned in the actual situation "an 'hour of fulfillment' of possibilities which earlier could not come to fulfillment." They opposed to this perception of an hour of fulfillment a Lutheran transcendental theology which declared this utopic action to be "a preliminary and consequently ambiguous one" that "we did not dare" affirm as absolute.

After this, says Tillich, came "terror, and fanaticism turned against itself." This reaffirmed the sense that actualized utopia in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶² Tillich, *Political Expectation* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971), 125-180.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

existence “remains provisional and ambiguous.” They were told that the *kairos* concept would “weaken the revolutionary forces” because it could not “demand an unconditional faith.” Indeed, says Tillich, their critics had a point. Basic social insecurity increases human beings’ desire to “surrender themselves totally to a finite reality.”⁶⁵ Forces “aroused” in this way “dare not be underestimated” and “are indeed great forces,” leading to the necessity of “an unconditional commitment against them.” This unconditional commitment must be coupled, however, with the knowledge that “we are not committed to something absolute but to something provisional and ambiguous” that is subject to criticism and even to rejection, but that at the moment calls for an unambiguous “Yes.”

Without this reserve, this contracting movement of withdrawal from the actual that makes every concrete utopian struggle appear as fragmentary and anticipatory, the utopian self-transcendence that can be or is being actualized in the *kairos* of the current context “collides with our own finite nature and shatters.” But with it, with the acknowledgement of the fragmentary and anticipatory nature of finite utopia grounded in the potentiality that is never wholly and finally actualized, “the truth of utopia is on our side and this truth will eventually triumph.” Despite being “rebuked repeatedly” for holding on to “this principle of ultimate criticism,” Tillich ends his autobiographical sketch by declaring that “history has proved us right.”

In these lectures, Tillich makes the relationship between the Dreaming Innocence myth and the demand that breaks it and that fuels movements against authority (bourgeois revolution) and exploitation (proletarian revolution) clearer than it is in the *Systematic Theology*. In the first lecture, he develops his political ontology starting from “man’s essence” and “the ground of being insofar as it reveals itself to man.”⁶⁶ As in the *Systematic Theology*, freedom means that a human being is “able to act as a whole person, as a self in the wholeness of his being” rather than as the vehicle of conflicting drives.⁶⁷ Freedom also means “having possibilities.” This is the case because human beings are “able to transcend the given, and infinitely to transcend it.”

Of course, this is not true “in fact,” and that is “the problem of finitude.” Unfreedom is dehumanizing primarily because the loss of selfhood, the loss of the unity of the person, results. “He who no longer is able to act from centeredness, from wholeness, whence all elements of his being join in an ultimate decision, has ceased to be man in the true sense of the word.” It is the loss of centeredness and not the loss of possibility that is primary and most tragic in unfreedom. The “I” becomes an object to others and to itself, “incapable of reacting in a centered way.”⁶⁸ Moreover,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

possibility is temptation: power corrupts because power means “having possibility in a concrete, practical sense.” If possibility “ontologically constitutes” the structure of humanity, this becomes “concrete possibility” in an organization or group that has power – giving politics its dignity and its temptations.

Humanity’s finitude means that the actualization of its possibility always threatens it with nonbeing. This threat is not simply a matter of external threats such as violence and death, but also a matter of internal threats such as “error and guilt.” Every transcendence of the given is subject to the loss of self in error and guilt. Thus, human beings are essentially anxious, and courage is the taking of that anxiety upon oneself rather than denying or overlooking it.

Since anxiety is ontological rather than simply psychological, it cannot be escaped. Under conditions of existence, it generates a “will to security” that “seeks always to safeguard against future threats by becoming all the more attached to the past.”⁶⁹ Tillich mentions that at “this” time (1951), this was becoming true in America. Americans were “choosing (the past) rather than the present or the future” because they believed they would find in that past unthreatened security where so much has survived for so long.⁷⁰ This statement is interesting in view of the way *Dreaming Innocence* functions in the *Systematic Theology* as a kind of absolute past eternally accompanying existence.

Tillich is here accusing Americans of seeking a return to *Dreaming Innocence* that, while manifesting the form of courage that self-protection is, loses “the dimension of the future.” Another side of anxiety attaches itself to expectation. Unlike security, expectation “looks to the fulfillment in the future of those possibilities which indeed constitute the essence” of humanity. Expectation, like security, looks to an absolute past of pure potentiality, but recomposes the elements of this past as partial and anticipatory fulfillment of that very non-actualized past. It “goes forward beyond the given, toward the future.” It has a double anxiety: anxiety about giving up security and anxiety about giving up the unrealized possibilities that this security stifles.

It is at this point in the lecture that Tillich explicitly introduces what he calls “the psychology of innocence.” Innocence, he says, is this expectation. It is anxious about losing possibilities and anxious about losing security. Innocence “stands between these two anxieties and in this situation of anxiety, it has to make a decision.” But when it does so, it can’t win for losing, and what it loses is precisely innocence, “even if it decides for non-actualization.” If Adam had decided to leave that fruit alone, he would still have fallen because “immediacy is in any case lost as

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

the result of conscious decision." This anxiety of expectation is what dreaming innocence looks like close-up in actual experience.

This is why every futurally-oriented utopian project, according to Tillich, looks to a prelapsarian past as fuel for a utopia that is nevertheless imagined as other than that past, as its fulfillment.⁷¹ Utopia is not just in the future but first of all "once upon a time." The "will to security" seeks "that which points to the future" among what is given as "having already been present in the past" and is thus accessible now as "essence." Here, Tillich cites fellow Schellingian socialist Ernst Bloch, whose writing on hope influenced liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, in support of his claim that "dreams of a better life – are primarily dreams that look in the first instance to the past but then also to the future." By looking to the past, warrant for the dreaming is "derived from the fact that the content of these dreams was once reality."

Tillich draws several examples from mythology and politics in which a time of origin renders plausible a better life in the future. In each of them, a primordial essence before the origin is lost and we now live in contradiction to it, but it can be restored. "The ontological distinction between essence and existence, essence and actuality, is here projected into the dimension of time."⁷² In myths of origin and expectation, we always live in the worst of times. "It is always the last period that gives birth to utopia." This is what makes the moment of reversal immanent.⁷³

Tillich castigates both existentialism and Karl Barth for abandoning the structure of expectation and the anxiety of Dreaming Innocence, the former by denying that humanity has an essence and the latter by declaring humanity to be too utterly estranged to participate in it. Barth, like Augustine, abandons expectation to the resignation that "the last age no longer lies before us" but against them Tillich poses "an unbroken movement of groups that believe there is a dialectic that makes the great reversal inevitable once the deepest No has been reached."⁷⁴

In the third lecture, Tillich declares that utopia etymologically suggests "that for which there is not yet or is no longer a place in reality, which can nowhere be found even if one goes to the remotest islands."⁷⁵ It is "that which comes out of the past as recollection and is an anticipation of what may come in the future."⁷⁶ Its principle is "the negation of the negative," of finitude and estrangement. Finitude and estrangement, however, are ubiquitous. This is why an imagined social utopia that isolates social utopia from nature and then expects "something within the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

human sphere that can be meaningful only if it is expected in unity with a universal healing” is the most unrealistic of all utopias, far more unrealistic than the frankly unrealistic Biblical vision of the lion lying down with the lamb. Since humanity is within nature, conflict in humanity is not ended as long as conflict in nature remains; conflict is natural as well as social and cannot be realistically transcended except in anticipatory and partial actualizations.⁷⁷

Power dynamics, likewise, cannot be escaped and “cannot be bad.” Utopia does not oppose these but rather opposes “the ruling structure” that is “actual as an estranged ruling structure” now in our present circumstances. This structure “has two sides,” authority and exploitation. Opposition to these occurs “through the whole of history” but culminates in the post-Enlightenment bourgeois revolutions founded on the immediate participation of rational beings in Reason. Tillich then repeats his criticism of the bourgeois assumption of harmony, though more gently than in *The Socialist Decision*. The fourth lecture discusses the positive meaning of utopia (truth, fruitfulness, and power) and its negative meaning (untruth, unfruitfulness, and impotence), and suggests the *kairos* as a concept that is grounded in self-transcendence: “only where life risks itself, stakes itself, and imperils itself in going as far as possible beyond itself” can life be found. What is not yet “lies still beyond the decision of whether it is possible or impossible” and because of this, Tillich suggests, an absolute unrealizable utopia – a potentiality that is in principle never realized, a messianic age that never comes – and a relative, immanent, and realizable partial and fragmentary actualization of it are necessary.

Dreaming Innocence here returns as what always accompanies and serves as a critical negation of every actual utopian project. Dreaming Innocence – potentiality that is never actualized, the absolute past – is both that from which we are separated by the decision to actualize the demand for self-transcendence, and that from which, from within existence, the demand itself comes to us. “Humanity before the Fall,” a repetition of the First Person of the Trinity, the state of ontological (as opposed to psychological or existential, e.g., estranged) anxiety, is repeated in the kairotic risk that, partially and fragmentarily, actualizes the New Being in social movements here and now and that provides the material for critical evaluation and transcendence of those movements.

The desire to return to Dreaming Innocence by preserving the given as a means of obtaining security fuels romantic reactionary politics, while the critical “use” of Dreaming Innocence, which couples it with rejection of the given, a decision to risk something new, fuels a revolutionary “utopian” politics that is perpetual, taking as it does its Dreaming Innocence with it even as it rejects the given. Revolutionary politics, the overthrowing of estranged

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

authority and exploitation, looks back toward *Dreaming Innocence* but leans into the demand that promises an actual future beyond authority and exploitation, but also beyond innocence and beyond dreaming.

Dreaming Innocence and "Americans": the Charrua and Us

The circumstances of the development of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* and his concept of *Dreaming Innocence* in particular belong to revolutionary political expectations and disappointments in Germany and to more muted but still decidedly left of center expectations and disappointments in the United States. As its anticipations in the dissertations on Schelling indicate, however, it is rooted in the post-Kantian idealism that coincided with the Napoleonic invasion of the multiple and complex tangle of small principalities and states forming the Holy Roman Empire, and the rise of bourgeois German nationalism.

The legacy of this movement is deeply ambiguous from the perspective of early twenty-first century struggles. J. Cameron Carter has argued at length that Kant's system, particularly when read in relationship to his anthropology, creates a new form of Christian supersessionism in which whiteness becomes the "biological underpinning" of modernity, its "racial ground."⁷⁸ Whiteness, for Kant, is the way that nature distributes "predispositions" for the deployment of universal Reason. Nature has equipped the human species with diverse "seeds" and "natural predispositions" that are activated only under specific environmental conditions, though once those seeds are "deeply rooted" through generations of reproduction, even environmental conditions do not immediately change them.

Whites, because they have been deposited in a "climatically moderate" region, are essentially or almost raceless⁷⁹ "a 'race' that is not quite a race."⁸⁰ Other races are trapped in their particularity, whereas whites are just human.⁸¹ This is especially true of black people. "In the Negro race, white flesh observes a race so mired in its particularity as never to be able to speak with universal force."⁸² Whites – as opposed to Hindus, Americans (indigenous peoples of America), and Blacks – are capable of successful revolutions.

As Carter reports, Kant in a private note wrote that "all of the races will undergo an inner rotting or decay leading to their utter

⁷⁸ J. Cameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 90.

eradication, but never that of whites.”⁸³ Reason’s interest, never merely speculative but practical, is in assisting human beings to cultivate freedom. This means assisting them in building a cosmopolis that runs only on Reason’s self-imposed laws, the laws of freedom and autonomy over against heteronomy. It means subordinating and eventually erasing the racial and cultural particularity that impede the building of this cosmopolis, sacrificing the particular to the universal.

Carter, echoing Charles Long,⁸⁴ detects this self-sacrifice of the particular working in Tillich’s notion of the cross, in which the particular man Jesus sacrifices himself to the Christ and is thus rendered *transparent* to God. If the analysis in this essay is correct, Tillich’s argument works against such transparency. The concept of Dreaming Innocence as Tillich develops it does not and cannot point to a transparent state. Further, the divine anxiety on which it finally lands raises questions about the degree to which transparency can be attributed to Tillich’s Jesus. But the mere name “Dreaming Innocence,” like the metaphor of transparency in Tillich’s Christology, cannot be freed of the *desire* for the kind of Enlightened Kantian identity that Tillich and his influences seek to escape.

While I think this desire is apparent in Tillich’s use of metaphor, I hope I have shown that Tillich’s notion of divinity is anything but transparent. It is grounded not in Kant but in Schelling’s response to the wreck of Kantian identity resulting from its internal conflicts, themselves a result of its collision with existence in the form of the “thing in itself,” radical evil, and the sublime. The transition from “Dreaming Innocence” to the Fall, from essential potentiality to actual existence, the “point of coincidence” between Fall and Creation, and the polarity within God that separates God’s will from its expression and then reunites them in Spirit, are all developments of his reading of Schelling.

The earliest Tillichian retelling of Dreaming Innocence and the Fall occurs in his first dissertation on Schelling. Here, it is not framed by the myth of Adam but by that of Creation and of Babel. Tillich, reading Schelling, writes that the completion of creation was humanity’s freedom.⁸⁵ God “did not desire the involuntary and untried blessedness of the creature.” Nevertheless, the Fall “does not occur because of any strict necessity,” and is not subject to a priori proof. It is a fact of existence, part of its structure but it is not, strictly speaking, necessary. Humanity’s freedom means that, like God in creation, humanity “can set the potencies in tension.” The “ambiguous nature of the first potency,” creator and destroyer of form, is in the human creature, and tempts that

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁴ Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 207.

⁸⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling’s Positive Philosophy* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1974), 73.

creature to be like God and to create and destroy. But “it is an error in man to believe that he can remain lord of the potencies (of dynamism and form) even when he has set them in motion.”

Instead, subjectivity, which is potential in every creature, attempts to negate the creature in whom it develops. “As long as man chooses to be the universal essence, he remains at the center, and is the lord of the potencies.” But when he wants to become lord of the potencies “as an individual being,” he becomes subject to “that which ought not to be,” or “that which ought to remain potential.”⁸⁶ Sin is neither exactly negative nor exactly positive but “that which is not but which desires to be,” and thus it is “a lie.”

The decision to sin results in the *dismemberment of consciousness* – its separation into multiple acts of synthesis and freedom, each of which is unconditional – and “the external, dismembered world arose, lacking inwardness,” the world of morally indifferent causal necessity. The “false” time also arose, the ever-repeating “unhappy and monotonous uniformity.” This world is “enslaved by the power of subjectivity” and “has fallen into the antithesis of particularity and abstraction,” into the world of categories of the understanding, of space and time. This is not a fall out of but into a Kantian world.

The essence from which humanity is separated in the Fall is not pure Reason but precisely what would have prevented Reason from closing in on itself, and thus precisely what prevents Kant and Fichte from completing the rational system. With the fantastic coincidence of universal freedom and transcendental apperception with multiple selves “comes the necessity of death.”⁸⁷ Death occurs because fallen humanity embodies two irreconcilable principles: “that which truly is and that which is not, but which wants to be.” Ideality and reality are separated, and “God is no longer united with his will in the world.”

Once humanity asserts autonomous freedom over and against the causal chain of appearances that resists that freedom, “the will of the ground becomes an enemy to creatures and a destroyer,” the very principle of divine wrath. In trinitarian terms, “God is no longer related to the world as Father, for only by the generation of the Son in the world process is he Father. But on account of the Fall, the Son, that is, the will of the second potency (form and act) has lost his lordship over being.”⁸⁸ In order to regain it, “a new process is necessary,” the process of history.

Reading Schelling’s *Philosophy of Mythology*, Tillich retells the Fall from Schelling once again, this time as the beginning of history rather than as the end of creation. The previous iteration of the Fall generates “the possibility of history” rather than immediately

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

actual history.⁸⁹ This is the “prehistorical” condition. It is “a situation in which nothing happens” outside natural functions, “a kind of eternity that only becomes time, that is, time past, by means of historical time.” Times in history are qualitatively different from each other because of the separation of prehistorical from historical time.

A prehistorical condition is a necessary myth because “every history, at the very least, presupposes a duality of principles that contend with each other.” The first potency keeps humanity in a condition “analogous to that total unconsciousness which prevailed before the beginning of the natural creation.” The “actualized ground” is “hostile to everything concrete, conscious, and spiritual” and preserves “a calm, undisturbed unity” and “an original, but relative monotheism” that does not oppose itself to polytheism. Tillich calls it “a monotheism mythologically conceived.” Prehistoric time is interrupted when the effect of the “second potency” on consciousness caused the severing of that unity, issuing in a “time of transition,” the proliferation of folk-gods, dissolution of humanity into “nations, tribes, and races” primarily by means of mythology.⁹⁰

The story of the Tower of Babel “manifests a genuine recollection of that moment when the second potency appeared from afar to consciousness, and mankind was seized by a fear of the loss of unity.” Every race thus “broke away from the common humanity” and “identified itself with that stage of the mythological process whose representative it was destined to become.” What is absent from Tillich’s otherwise quite detailed analysis of this text is what Schelling says about this divine act of racial apartheid. This is important because the ideological element of texts is often in what they leave out,⁹¹ particularly when what they leave out is a materiality that they invert, Marx’s “camera obscura.”

In *Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling writes that an “affection of consciousness” shook consciousness “in its ground” metaphorically struck the Tower of Babel and separated mythologies, languages, and races. Before this particular Fall, humanity’s “language is also fluid, mutable, not fully withdrawn from the others, such that to an extent, actually, various languages are spoken promiscuously, just as the old story assumes only a confusion, not immediately a complete separation of languages from each other.”⁹² Overlapping words and phrases are the traces of this transition. In historical existence, humanity is prevented

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen and Co., 1976), 34-35.

⁹² F. W. J. Schelling, *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Marcus Zisselsberger (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 79.

from this division of myth, language, and race by a “fear” of the loss of self.

Not an external impulse, but rather the impulse of inner agitation, the feeling not to be the entire humanity, but rather only a part of it; and no longer to belong to the ultimate One, but rather to have fallen prey to a particular god or particular gods: it is this feeling that drove them from land to land, from coast to coast, until each saw itself alone and separated from all the foreign peoples and had found the place proper and destined for them.⁹³

There are two races that stand as exceptions to the general rule that balances the separation of languages and myths with the dread that conserves their unity: the “African bushmen” and “savages in South America.” Here, Schelling cites 18th century Spanish Enlightenment naturalist, soldier, and surveyor Felix de Azara’s account of the people with whom he dwelt while waiting for the arrival of Portuguese counterparts to complete the demarcation of boundaries between Spanish and Portuguese territories. Schelling accurately cites Azara’s report, which characterizes these aborigines as

without any type of community among themselves, fully like animals of the field, in that they acknowledge just as little a visible authority above themselves as an invisible one, and feel as foreign to each other as animals of the same species feel to each other. And the form a people just as little as the wolves or foxes form a people amongst themselves; indeed, they live more unsociably than some of the animals living and working in a community, such as the beavers, ants, or honey bees. Every effort to make them into a people – that is, to produce amongst them a social connection – would be in vain. Introduced by violent fiat, such a connection would be their demise; it would be a proof that a people not born immediately as a people can come into being through neither divine power nor human power and that where the original unity and community of consciousness is missing, none can be produced.⁹⁴

Schelling argues that, based on this report, these people indubitably “are without religion.”⁹⁵

The role of the “exceptions” for Schelling is to show this to us: the “still only externally human population of South America” is not

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

a survival of humanity's earliest condition, "the first condition," because "they refute most definitively the illusion of such a stupid primordial condition of the human species, in that they indicate that from out of such a condition no progress is possible."⁹⁶ They are not humankind in a pre-lapsarian state, and they are not remnants of the indistinct unity of and relative monotheism of prehistory. They do not belong to Dreaming Innocence. Nor can they be justly regarded as a reversion of formerly enlightened peoples to barbarism. Even a degenerated nation still has marriage and family, moveable property, and contracts.

Political decay could not produce "such a state of absolute lawlessness, and – such a dehumanization (brutality), as is that in which those races are found that are without respect of any law, and any society, or any obligatory regulations, as well as without any religious ideas."⁹⁷ Although they have never posed a problem for conventional thinkers, who "merely help themselves on with already used thoughts," they give reason for a "thorough thinker" to pause, since such a thinker can find "no place for them."

They seem to me to be only the tragic result of precisely that crisis from out of which the rest of mankind had saved the ground of all human consciousness, while this ground was fully lost for them. They are the still living testimony of the completed, utterly unrestrained dissolution; the entire curse of the dispersion has been realized in them – actually they are, properly, the flock that grazes without shepherd; and, without becoming a people, they were annihilated in just the crisis that gave the peoples determinate being.⁹⁸

Schelling argues that "the condition preceding the emergence of peoples" still seen among these savages is "a condition of complete un-culture and animal coarseness, from which a transition to social development would never have been possible." Indeed, one of these savages "has as little a past as any species of animal." They are "the part of the original humanity in which all consciousness of unity has really perished." So "we see in them what the whole of humanity would have become, if it had saved nothing of the original unity."

As further evidence, Schelling cites the traces of original unity preserved in even the most diverse languages but lacking among Americans. "I doubt any material agreement between the idioms of this American population and the languages of peoples proper, just as I must leave undecided to what extent the study that has been devoted to these idioms was able to fulfill the hope in which it was undertaken, namely, to arrive at real, namely genetic elements of them."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

Instead of related idioms, “the language changes from horde to horde, even from hut to hut, such that often only the members of the same family understand each other; and not merely this, but rather the capacity for language itself seems with them to be near termination and extinction.” They speak only softly, he says, and they do not cry out “even when one kills them.” They hardly move their lips, and their speech is not accompanied by “a look that demands attentiveness.” Their language “hovers at the final frontier, beyond which it ceases entirely.”¹⁰⁰

For Schelling, these savages evoke “this fear, this horror before the loss of all consciousness of unity,” which is nothing short of the total disappearance “of all truly human consciousness” and which provided human peoples “with the first institutions of the religious type” and “even the first civil institutions.” The horror of this loss of humanity motivates “the formation of special communities” and the division into castes, “whose foundation is as old as history and common to all peoples.” The building of the Tower of Babel is not for Schelling a manifestation of hubris but rather a response to a crisis of dispersion – the threat of the loss of a center – but this impulse toward preservation of unity is simultaneously where “the separation begins, thus also the repulsion and exclusion.”¹⁰¹ The Cyclops, for Schelling, is a mythic reminder of the “beginning toward those fully disbanded races” where “none show consideration for the others, in that they remain as foreign amongst themselves as animals do and are not bound through any consciousness to any sort of solidarity.”

What is happening here? In the course of developing an account of philosophical history (not the history of philosophy) that includes a history of religion that may have inspired Tillich’s own early and late interest in the history of religion, Schelling, like Tillich, is trying to negotiate a tension in German politics and culture that dates to from the French Revolution, runs through the various alliances forged against an Enlightenment, revolutionary French domination in which German nationalism was born, and re-emerges in Tillich’s time as the tense alliance between the forces of romantic reaction and the forces of bourgeois revolution, and as the conflict of proletarian movements with both.

Schelling, whose life coincides with the beginning of the long nineteenth century in German-speaking areas of Europe, like Tillich, whose life corresponds with its abrupt end in World War I and its aftermath, is anxious about these tensions and, while ultimately affirming the revolutionary impulse, tempers this affirmation with a fear of the loss of a unity that can only be preserved by the powers of origin, by one’s distinct and particular cultural ground. Recall that Tillich’s *Dreaming Innocence* remains strangely contemporary with estranged existence as ontological

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

anxiety and absolute utopia, and that its loss is one of the risks that makes self-transcendence so risky.

The kind of atheism for which Schelling cites Azara appears as “unbelief” in the *Systematic Theology*.¹⁰² In unbelief, a human being “turns to himself and away from God in knowledge, will, and emotion.”¹⁰³ Unbelief is not a refusal to adhere to doctrine, but “the empirical shift from the blessedness of divine life to the pleasures of a separated life.”¹⁰⁴ In this context, it might also be important to recall that Tillich, in his lectures on utopia, rejects the notion that “those who are lowest in society in terms of power of being are the real bearers of utopia because of their discontent.”¹⁰⁵ Rather, the bearers of utopia are “those who have sufficient power of being to achieve advance.”

Tillich points to the role of the “highly cultivated” bourgeoisie in the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to support this view. Here, he seems to be saying that effective ontological discontent depends on having at least one leg standing in the powers or origin, which here appear as a kind of stable ground from which revolution can be launched. Is *Dreaming Innocence* finally what separates a highly cultivated vanguard from the reign of particularity that overwhelms “those who are lowest in society”?

Schelling reads Azara’s account as testimony to just this kind of extreme separation, separation that encompasses language, religion, and culture, so that even false gods are abandoned without a shred of interest. Azara’s wild Americans, for Schelling, are not warnings to German readers about the ambiguous nature of the powers of origin, but conversely, monstrous testimony to the disintegrative powers of the demand, the revolutionary element within the origin, when the origin fails to restrain them. Azara’s religion-less wild Indians were the Charrua, who by Azara’s own account, mounted a more effective resistance to Spanish invasion than the Aztecs.¹⁰⁶

He also notes that the Europeans who are captured by them “seldom decide to return to their parents and relatives” due to the freedom they have found among the Charrua.¹⁰⁷ Earlier, the Jesuit Lozano had expressed a horror at this “Geneva of these provinces” that calls to mind the horror that Schelling, though not Azara himself, expresses at the way of life he sees described in Azara’s text:

¹⁰² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 49.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Tillich, *Political Expectation* (New York: Harper Row, 1971), 170.

¹⁰⁶ Félix Azara, *Descripción e historia del Paraguay y Río de la Plata*. vol. I (Madrid: Sanchiz, 1847), 150.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

There, not only indians, but Mestizos, blacks and even some Spaniards (a horrifying thought), who want to live without social constraints or fear of the righteousness of the judges because of their enormous crimes, which they continue and augment in Charrua lands, live in a fashion that is worse than the pagans.¹⁰⁸

Gustavo Verdesio¹⁰⁹ notes that, despite the horror Lozano expresses at the Charrua's failure to adopt Western juridical institutions and their mentality, a text that describes Charrua life in terms suggesting a kind of utopia is generated. Verdesio is not asserting merely that this text might correspond to our own notions of utopia, but that it corresponds to Lozano's own examples of European quasi-utopias. Lozano's reference to the city of Geneva, famous for giving sanctuary to refugees, confers on the Charrua a dignity he does not appear to intend.

His use of the word "freedom," which at the time of his writing was becoming a kind of shorthand for bourgeois revolutionary ambitions, does the same. Finally, as Verdesio argues, Lozano's text (and Azara's as well, though not the part quoted by Schelling) informs us of an objective fact: members of diverse cultures and ethnic groups sought refuge among the Charrua, a culture that the authorities they were fleeing considered inferior to the European one.¹¹⁰

In April 1831, while Schelling was in Munich working on his *Philosophy of Mythology*, the first president of Uruguay held a barbeque that he thought would attract the largest possible number of Charrua.¹¹¹ Once the guests had taken their fill of food and strong drink, a contingent of soldiers led by the president's nephew began killing them. Women and children were enslaved. The few men who escaped were hunted down a few months later, again by the president's nephew.

The *Criollo* ruling class, for whom the Charrua represented a failure to adapt to the requirements of a universal brotherhood, which had to include such supposedly universal needs as respect for private property, was silent about this massacre. Four surviving Charrua, including a shaman, a warrior, and a young couple, were captured and taken to Paris, where they were exhibited to the public and studied by naturalists. A child was born to the young couple. The three of them died a few years later.

¹⁰⁸ Pedro Lozano, *Historia de la conquista del Paraguay, Río de la Plata y Tucumán*, ed. Andre's Lamas, vol. I (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Popular, 1873), 410-11.

¹⁰⁹ Gustavo Verdesio, *Forgotten Conquests: Rereading New World History from the Margins* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 98.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

Until the 1990s, the response of intellectuals to these massacres, says Verdesio, was “silence and dissimulation.”¹¹²

In “Interpretations of Black Religion in America,” Charles Long characterized the “American experience” as Otto’s *mysterium fascinosum* without the *mysterium tremendum*.¹¹³ The Enlightenment’s “direct relationship to the sacred” through the forms of nature and moral conscience (theoretical and practical reason) was that through which “the destruction of the Indian cultures took place, and a nation which at its inception proclaimed the equality of all human beings was able to continue the institution of slavery.”¹¹⁴

The “innocence and naivete of the American” emerges from self-concealment, and “is gained only through an intense suppression of the deeper and more subtle dimension of American experience.” Americans don’t have time to contemplate the depth of their deeds. They are always rushing forward. By means of this outward and forward gaze, Americans “are able to repress the profound and agonizing relationship which has defined their being in space and nature.”¹¹⁵ In reference to Thomas JJ Altizer’s account of Moby Dick, Long, echoing his criticism of Tillich, says that this account “speaks of death as glibly as if he has never experienced, or is afraid to experience, the dying and the killing itself.” There is “no patience, no meditative attitude, no attentiveness” in this headlong rush into the future. Thus, this eschatology “is not rooted in that basic contact with reality which is the touchstone of every myth.” But there is another American experience,

that has confronted the reality of America, not as a plastic and flexible reality, amenable to the human will through hard work and moral fortitude, but as a reality impenetrable, definite, subtle, a reality so agonizing that it forced the American to give up innocence while at the same time sustaining him as joy and promise.¹¹⁶

This quality of experience “destroyed forever the naïve innocence, simultaneously revealing a God of both nature and time – a God” – quoting *Lift Every Voice and Sing* – “of our silent tears and a God of our weary years.” Long proposes an orientation “that might be able to affirm nature as a non-innocent reality and at the same time open up the possibility of a true historical future” that would emerge only after America comes to terms “with its own depth in reality” and begins to take “the integrity of nature seriously.”

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Long, 154.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

Long's orientation has much in common with Tillich's, but it calls for turning our gaze toward a past that begins with a contact between Europeans and those who did not fit easily into their myths of origin. This past, like *Dreaming Innocence*, is absolute in the sense that it is obscured by the conventional story of the mighty deeds of great men but accompanies that story as its disavowed underside, and it holds the key to promise. This is why a historiography of "the true story of America" would not take the place of an "objective" reporting of facts, because this very mode of historiography repeats the tale of self-transparent Reason and the mighty deeds of Reasoned men.¹¹⁷ Long suggests it belongs to the category of myth.

Tillich's characterization of *Dreaming Innocence* does not appear to have a place in this orientation, because innocence itself has become a suspicious category, as it already was for Tillich. But the Charrua do have a place, and not only as a monstrous other signifying unrestrained dispersion and loss of center. They have a place as "the depth in reality" of the struggle against an authority and exploitation that poses as objective, free, and innocent. The Charrua do not fit well into the picture of *Dreaming Innocence* but their centuries of effective resistance to the men who do the mighty deeds does suggest that they can inspire such resistance now and can offer a vision of a kind of world where the demand for freedom that Europe purports to cherish can be met, though not on terms set by the Europeans. But in addition to reading the silences in the texts about them that testify to their agency, as Verdesio does, this would involve facing up to the irretrievable loss of innocence in all its horrific and paradoxical detail as the reality within which joy and promise can appear.

Not *Dreaming Innocence* but precisely the *mysterium tremendum*, the impenetrable reality that resists transparency, the agonizing, conflictual encounter with an actual otherness that resists and does not yield to any demand, becomes the source for imagining and actualizing a New World and a New Being, if we have the courage to face that reality.

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¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

