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TOTALITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM BETWEEN TILLICH AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Robert P. SCHARLEMANN

RÉSUMÉ. — *Le rapport de la pensée et de l'être est un problème commun à Tillich et à l'École de Francfort. Un tel rapport ne peut être assuré par une métaphysique transhistorique, pas plus qu'il ne peut l'être par la notion du prolétariat en tant que classe privilégiée pour la connaissance, ou par celle de l'intelligentsia en tant que classe n'ayant aucun intérêt vital impliqué dans la connaissance. Mais Tillich se distingue de l'École de Francfort, pour autant qu'il refuse la « dialectique négative », qui se contente d'exposer et de réfuter toute prétention à la connaissance absolue ou métaphysique ; sa solution consiste plutôt à adopter un point de vue concret, qui s'affirme de façon absolue en même temps qu'il critique sa propre affirmation.*

SUMMARY. — *The connection of thinking and being was a problem Tillich and the Frankfurt School shared. Such a connection cannot be secured by a transhistorical metaphysics, nor can it be secured by the notion of the proletariat as a cognitively privileged class or of the intelligentsia as a class having no vital interests involved in knowledge. But Tillich differed from the Frankfurt School in his proposing a solution not by a "negative dialectic", whose function is only to expose and deny every pretension to absolute or metaphysical knowledge, but by taking a concrete standpoint that both asserts itself absolutely and also criticizes its own assertion.*

Tillich's interest in socialism and in Marxist social critique is perhaps the only interest he shared with Horkheimer and Adorno of the Frankfurt School. Apart from that shared interest, their enduring friendship was scarcely rooted in a common philosophy and still less in a common theological understanding. This is more the case between Tillich and his student and later colleague Adorno than between him

and his younger colleague Horkheimer. Indeed, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* is almost diametrically opposed to Tillich's systematic thought, as Adorno himself suggested¹. *Negative dialectics* makes an issue of the fact that philosophy cannot disengage its concepts from its rhetoric; Tillich's systematic works are uniformly directed toward conceptual clarification, and their rhetorical power, which in certain cases is quite great, has as much to do with Tillich's person as with his rhetoric. *Negative Dialectics* is a sustained attack on Heidegger and a thoroughgoing misunderstanding of what Heidegger's *Being and Time* had as its theme; Tillich's *Systematic Theology* is a careful appropriation of basic elements of the same work. Neither Tillich nor Adorno seems to have read much of the later Heidegger besides the Letter on Humanism. But few friendships can be sustained by a community of *not* having read this or that author's works. So the friendship of Tillich with these members of the Frankfurt School owed its endurance not to Tillich's thought but to a personal relation that was genuine and lasting. Adorno and Horkheimer both attest that fact².

Is it possible to identify the fundamental difference between Tillich on one side and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other? I should like to attempt such an identification by reference to the question of totality, of which Adorno once wrote: "The antinomy of totality and infinity — for the restless *ad infinitum* explodes the self-contained system, for all its being owed to infinity alone — is of the essence of idealism."³ The concept of totality plays a role that is of secondary importance in Tillich's own system. But it is of primary importance in defining his relation to the critical theory of the early Frankfurt School, for that theory was concerned with preventing the totalization of critique, which should always be particular. My concern here is to use this concept of totalization to show the nature of the difference between Tillich and the Frankfurt School, in particular Horkheimer and Adorno. Totality poses a problem common to them. Tillich's way of dealing with it distinguishes him from that school, more sharply from Adorno than from Horkheimer, but still from both of them and, generally, from the representatives of critical theory as a group; and it explains why there can be a theology in Tillich's thought but not in critical theory. The problem is this: Statements of totality are inherently self-contradictory. Does it follow from this, as Horkheimer insisted, that critique should restrict itself to particulars? Or is it possible, as Tillich maintained, that the antinomy of totality may take the form of positive paradox and the historical power of a creative standpoint instead of being self-destructive, as in a formal contradiction, or collapsing under the attack of the infinite? Tillich's notion of the positive paradox, of which one can detect indirect criticisms in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*⁴ and through which Tillich launched a public

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1. *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch* [hereafter *WW*], Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967, p. 34.
 2. *WW*, p. 25; Paul TILlich, *Gesammelte Werke* [hereafter *GW*], ed. Renate Albrecht, vol. 13, Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1972, pp. 568f.
 3. Theodor W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics* [hereafter *ND*], tr. E. B. Ashton, New York, Continuum, 1987; from the German edition 1966, p. 26.
 4. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [hereafter *DE*], tr. John Cumming, New York, Continuum, 1989; from the German 1944. See, e.g., p. 20: "The paradoxical nature of faith ultimately degenerates into a swindle, and becomes the myth of the twentieth century; and its irrationality turns it into an instrument of rational administration by the wholly enlightened as they steer society toward barbarism." The context does not

debate with Karl Barth even before his association with the members of the Frankfurt School, provides his answer.

The difference between Tillich and critical theory on just this matter appears in a comparison of Tillich's and Horkheimer's reviews of Karl Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*. Tillich published a review in 1929; Horkheimer published a more extensive but similarly critical assessment in the following year⁵. Tillich essentially criticized Mannheim for *failing* to totalize the concept of ideology; Horkheimer criticized Mannheim for *trying to totalize* the concept of ideology from Marx. In the scattered allusions in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* it becomes clear that the Frankfurt School was close to religious socialism in the intention of its critical theory but nonetheless different from Tillich. In what did their proximity and in what did their distance lie? An interesting side issue, upon which I shall not enter, is the question why Adorno and Horkheimer for their part disagree with Tillich, Adorno so much so that he could refer to debates with Tillich as similar to wild animals going at each other, but mostly in the form of allusions and hardly ever in the form of explicit criticism. The ready answer to this question is that both of them were so deeply impressed by the integrity of his person and the genuineness of their friendship that they avoided direct debate with him in writing. Their own words provide testimony to that fact. But might they not also have sensed that Tillich had preempted the criticism but in a way not quite clear to either Adorno or Horkheimer? It is an interesting question but too conjectural to be pursued here.

I. TOTALITY AND IDEOLOGY

In his review, Tillich offers as his basic criticism that the concept of ideology, which Mannheim wants to make total, cannot be total if the intelligentsia, the social class to whom Mannheim assigns the task of exposing ideology, are not themselves *seinsgebunden*, ontically bound⁶. His criticism is this: If the intelligentsia are not ontically bound, they cannot constitute the class capable of unmasking ideas as ideological. Why that is so is set forth in a highly condensed argument. We can perhaps see its point more clearly if we expand Tillich's compact presentation. Let me try to do this in a few paragraphs. My aim will be to show the nature of Tillich's criticism rather than to follow precisely the lines of his own argument.

The thesis of ideology is that all ideas are instruments of mastery and domination. It is the view that people recognize and assert as true those ideas that serve their own

indicate that this reference to the "paradoxical" nature of faith is a criticism of Tillich, but it does make clear that Adorno and Horkheimer either have little understanding of or little sympathy with what Tillich understood faith to be and that they saw "paradoxes" as inherently self-destructive.

5. Paul TILlich, "Ideologie und Utopie: Zum gleichnamigen Buch von Karl Mannheim", *Die Gesellschaft*, vol. 6 (1929), 348-355; also in TILlich, *GW*, vol. 13, Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1971, pp. 255-261. Max HORKHEIMER, "Ein neuer Ideologiebegriff?" in his *Sozialphilosophische Studien: Aufsätze, Reden und Vorträge 1930-1972*, ed. Werner Brede, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1981, pp. 13-32.
6. Horkheimer remarks in his review a year later that Mannheim's use of the concept of *Seinsgebundenheit* lacks any theory to give it content. In his own review, Tillich gives no evidence of a problem with the concept itself. See Max Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

interests, which is to say, more specifically, the interests of the social class to which they belong and which maintain mastery over nature and domination over subordinate classes. If the thesis is totalized, then it must apply to the idea of ideology itself. Can it be totalized without being invalidated itself? The standard philosophical way of showing the impossibility of such totalization is found in the refutation of skepticism, and when Horkheimer criticizes Mannheim for converting Marx's scientific critique, which can always be only specific and partial, into a philosophical concept, which is total, he appears to have that problem in mind. For, when totalized, the thesis of ideology is invalid because self-contradictory. In that regard it suffers the fate of skepticism, if skepticism takes the position that we cannot know the truth about anything. The refutation of skepticism is to show that if the skeptical thesis is assumed to be true, then it turns out not to be true; for we can at least know what is true about knowledge. If we can know that we cannot know what is true, then it is not true that we cannot know what is true. Skepticism can be consistent as an attitude or as a dialectical moment in the development of positions, but it cannot be a position of its own. A similar refutation can be made of ideology. If all ideas are, as the ideological thesis asserts, means of maintaining control, and not a reflection of reality, then the idea that ideas are means of control is a means of control and not a reflection of what ideas really are. The idea that all ideas are ideological can be true only if it is not ideological itself. But if this one idea is not ideological, then it is not true that all ideas are ideological, and ideology is refuted because its idea is self-contradictory. To be consistent, the ideological thesis has to be ideological itself. But if it is itself ideological, then it cannot be a statement of what ideas really are; it can only be an assertion of the self-interest of the ideologue. The conclusion which follows from the self-contradiction present in any totalized position is always that every such totality is self-destructive. If an assertion about the totality of assertions has the character of those assertions — in this case, if it has the character of being ideological — then it cannot be a true assertion about them at all. If, on the other hand, the assertion about the totality of assertions does not have the same character as other assertions, then it can be an assertion about the totality of assertions only by having characteristics that, according to the assertion, it cannot have. In either case, it cannot be true. (A more complete statement would be to say that every assertion of a totality is either an empty tautology or a self-contradiction. But it is only the latter which is involved in the refutation of skepticism or ideology).

Such classical refutations have their appeal, and Tillich does on other occasions employ one of them against skepticism, to show that skepticism can be an attitude, parasitic upon what is given to a skeptic to doubt, but cannot be a position of its own. His criticism of Mannheim, however, is a different one from this, although it is similar at the end. For he acknowledges that Mannheim's way of giving the intelligentsia as a class the possibility of taking an absolute standpoint, that is, a nonideological one, is not only different from the theoretical totalizing done by Hegel and Marx, when they viewed the whole of history from the end of its development, but is close in character to the religious socialists' conception of *kairos* as over against *logos*. Mannheim does not place his standpoint at the end of historical development so as to be able to totalize history from a transhistorical position. Rather, like the theory of *kairos*,

he attributes to one historical class, in this case the intelligentsia, the possibility of interpreting nonideologically the ideology of classes. The reason lies in the nature of the class of intelligentsia. Members of this class can see through ideology nonideologically just because their class interest is an interest in ideas themselves; it is not bound up with being a partisan of one idea rather than another idea. The real existence of the intelligentsia is bound up with being free for ideas on their own merits as ideas and not with the prevalence of one idea rather than another idea. The class interest of the intelligentsia could be affected only by the devaluation of ideas as ideas. In that sense, the intelligentsia are in a class different from other social classes; they can be impartial without being indifferent to ideologies. Their ideas are not *seinsgebunden*, or ontically bound, as are the ideas of other classes because they are bound to ideas as ideas. Their interests as intelligentsia are served no more by the idea of capitalism, for example, than by the idea of socialism.

If this is a correct, though formalized, explication of Tillich's understanding of Mannheim, then one can understand why Tillich sees a similarity here to the religious socialists' idea of *kairos*. Mannheim's is not Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge or Marx's conception of the end of history. The intelligentsia are a class within history, and their ideas are not absolute knowledge. But they have the peculiarity that the interest of their class is served by either of two conflicting ideologies. Hence, they belong to a class whose ideology is impartial to ideologies⁷. They can associate themselves with the proletariat, not because they share the destiny of that class, but because they can judge the kairic significance of this class.

Now, Tillich's criticism is this: Mannheim intends to make the ideology concept total, so that even the intelligentsia do have a class interest, but he cannot make it total if the place at which it is total is that of the intelligentsia, a class whose ideas are not "ontically bound". For this is to say that in the ideology of the intelligentsia the idea is separated from the reality, or thought is severed from being. But an ideology that is not ontically bound, an ideology bound only to ideas and not to being, because the social class representing it is unaffected by it, is in fact no longer ideology. If ideology is total only when ideas are separated from reality, then the concept of ideology is not universal after all; it cannot be totalized. Mannheim's argument amounts to saying that there is one class in society which, unlike other classes, is not affected in its real existence by the ideas it espouses; its ideology, serving the interests of the class which represents ideas as ideas, is an ideology without the deceptive quality of ideologies otherwise. The concept of ideology can be totalized just because what the intelligentsia are is not affected by which of two conflicting political ideologies they may in given cases adopt. Mannheim draws from this the conclusion that the intelligentsia can see through the ideological character of ideology; they are, we might say, ideologically transideological. Tillich draws a different conclusion. He concludes that, if the intelligentsia are not "ontically bound", they cannot overcome ideology with ideology. It is a judgment Tillich expresses later in *The Socialist Decision* as

7. I think this is the nature of Tillich's reading of Mannheim. But it should be stressed that my presentation of it is a construction of the logic behind Tillich's rather brief comments; it is not a résumé of Mannheim's thesis nor a strict reproduction of Tillich's critique.

well. "Intellectuals and agitators cannot create any movement at all unless they give expression to an existence that cries out, independently, for expression and fulfillment."⁸ Nonetheless, Tillich thinks Mannheim is on the right track in trying to show how ideology can be conquered within ideology and not from beyond it. His critique brings the question into focus. What kind of thinking is capable of recognizing and transcending class interest? Is it the thinking done by those whose class interest is only in ideas as ideas, namely, the intelligentsia? Or, as religious socialism asserted, is it the thinking of a class who at the right time, in the *kairos* but only then, also represent a value that breaks through class interest so that the victory of *this* class in its struggle creates new conditions of existence for other classes as well? In short, is it in the neutrality of a class interest that ideology can be totalized, or is it in the creativity of the right time, the *kairos*, for a certain class? Tillich takes the position, contrary to Mannheim, that it is not impartial interest (as in the intelligentsia) but the creativity provided by the right time, the *kairos*, which transcends ideology from within ideology or which, in other words, makes the totalization of ideology creative rather than destructive. It makes the formal contradiction contained in the logic of totalization into a creativity, a "positive paradox", instead of a nullifying contradiction.

In his review of Mannheim's book a year later, Horkheimer for his part expresses a different criticism. In brief, he charges Mannheim with subverting ideological critique by trying to totalize it. Not that Mannheim does this in the manner of reconstructing a static metaphysics; sociology of knowledge, as he describes it, always has the character of a *Situationsbericht*. Rather, Horkheimer's objection is that, unlike Marx, whose aim was to convert philosophy into a positive science of social critique, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge converts concrete criticism into a philosophy of *Weltanschauungen*. The question by which sociology of knowledge is unsettled and which it seeks to illuminate is the problem of "absolute truth"; the insight into the changeability of all metaphysical systems is a metaphysical procedure itself, one which is said to open an increasingly rich view of "reality"⁹.

Horkheimer sees evidence of this conversion into a totality not only in the fact that the concept of *Seinsgebundenheit* has to presuppose something on the order of Hegelian "being" in order to have any content but also in the theological and mystical allusions to "the unnamable (*das Unbenennbare*) but always intended object of ecstatic thinkers" which, according to Mannheim, gives a meaning to the whole of history. Such references are, in Horkheimer's judgment, at odds with Mannheim's own concept of ideology. Ideological critique can exist as specific and particular; it can discern the features of the false that appear in every particular configuration¹⁰. But it can do

8. *The Socialist Decision*, tr. Franklin Sherman, New York, Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 62f. See also pp. 98f.

9. HORKHEIMER, *op. cit.*, pp. 17f.

10. "Dialectic [...] interprets every image as writing. It shows how the admission of its falsity is to be read in the lines of its features — a confession that deprives it of its power and appropriates it for truth. With the notion of determinate negativity [which rejects defective ideas of the absolute], Hegel revealed an element that distinguishes the Enlightenment from the positivist degeneracy to which he attributes it. By ultimately making the conscious result of the whole process of negation — totality in system and in history — into an absolute, he of course contravened the prohibition and himself lapsed into mythology." (*DE*, p. 24)

this only in concreto, only in direct confrontation with a present reality, and never in advance or all at once. It cannot be totalized.

The totality which we have been discussing thus far concerns the possibility of including the idea of ideology within an ideology. This question of totality is parallel to the ancient question whether the concept of being, which can be predicated of everything, can be predicated of itself, or, more technically, whether it can be defined as a genus. The question drew Aristotle's interest and lay behind the first doctrine of the analogy of being that we know. Ideological totality is an exact parallel, for the question whether the idea of ideology is itself ideological is of the same intention as the question whether being is a predicate of itself or, in Tillich's language, whether being itself is a being. (A chorus of Tillich students will, no doubt, be able to answer this last question in their sleep.) These are parallel ways in which the totality of self-reference or self-inclusion appears. If the problem of the universality of being leads to the doctrine of the analogy of being, because being is not a genus, we can say that the problem of the totality of the idea leads to the doctrine of creative standpoint, because the idea of ideology is not ideological.

II. TOTALITY AND UNITY

A second sense of totality comes into view as the totality which is disturbed, or disrupted, by enlightenment, as Horkheimer and Adorno set forth the meaning of enlightenment in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. It is totality in the sense of the unity of a percept (sense-intuition) and concept (abstract thought) in the being of an entity; it is totality in the sense of the wholeness of an entity, the unity of an object as it appears to our senses and the same object as it is grasped by our concept. We see a tree with our eyes, we can touch it, measure it, hear the wind in its branches; we conceive the same tree in the concept of what kind of thing a tree is, an abstract concept of a genus or class of things. The totality of a tree is both of these together, the unity of intuition and concept in the being of the thing we understand to be a tree. The focus of such a totality is language. For it is the word "tree" or a discourse of the tree that both presents the whole object in an image and is the sign of the presence of the whole object. Now, enlightenment, as Adorno and Horkheimer spoke of it, is the process which disrupts this totality of intuition and concept that appears in names and discursive language. It disturbs the unity of image and sign by separating language as image from language as sign. In its primitive stage, human existence rests in the totality that is the unity of these two, image and sign, in its words. The names which signify the surprising events that found communities — such as the name "I am who I am" given in Moses' experience of the burning bush — are such unities. Hence, to speak the name is to summon the reality. Enlightenment is the movement away from the primitive unity by way of a process of objectification toward a separation of sign from image and subject from object. Science is henceforth made possible by the use of language as sign; poetry, by the use of language as image. Between science and poetry, art expresses the totality once more, but only because it erects a world of its

own closed off from the world of everyday; after the enlightenment, authentic art cannot be imitative of a world already there but must make its own world.

The question enlightenment therefore raises is whether the separation of image and sign, of reality and subject, can be reversed. To this Horkheimer and Adorno give an unequivocal and negative answer: "The separation of sign and image is irremediable."¹¹ The separation cannot be undone, and that is one reason why the process of enlightenment is irreversibly destructive. It begins by seeking to know the truth behind the appearances and ends by cutting off the only route there can be to those appearances. In this sense of the word, totality places us into the vicinity of Tillich's notion of a broken symbol — a symbol recognized as other than what it symbolizes but still capable of functioning as a unity of meaning and reality. One could say that the difference between Tillich and the Frankfurt School lies here. For Tillich, there can be "broken" symbols which still mediate totalities; for Horkheimer and Adorno there cannot be correspondingly "broken" unities of science and poetry but only aestheticizing science or scientific art, both of which amount to no more than nostalgic attempts to recover a lost Eden¹².

Let us try to see more precisely what is involved in this aspect of the question of totality and in Tillich's difference from Adorno and Horkheimer. The key word for understanding this part of the thought of the Frankfurt School is "disenchantment" [*Entzauberung*]. The enchanted world is one in which there are at work subjectivities other than human beings; the disenchanted world is one in which the only subjectivities are human beings. The progress of enlightenment is that of seeing through the illusion of "magical" powers, powers which, though natural, are invested with the qualities of subjectivity. The program accomplishing this aim was that of dissolving the myths and substituting knowledge for fancy. Demythologizing and demystifying go hand in hand with the acquisition of scientific knowledge. But the progress is at the same time a "march to disaster". "The Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty, yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."¹³ The reason for this outcome lies in the power of myths. For the only power capable of shattering the mythical is the power of technological knowledge; and yet this very technology, which offers nothing for contemplation or pleasure but everything for work and business, is ultimately destructive. Contemplative knowledge cannot break the power of myth. We can understand why that is so even if Adorno and Horkheimer do not directly tell us. Mythical figures do offer meanings for contemplation. They can yield an understanding of being. Hence, they cannot be destroyed by a reason which contemplates meanings; even demythologizing reason retrieves the meaning of the myths. They can be destroyed only by the kind of reason that tries to

11. *DE*, p. 18.

12. Not that the notion of paradox, or self-transcending contradictions, is entirely foreign to Adorno and Horkheimer. "That factor in a work of art which enables it to transcend reality [...] is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears [not a unity of form and content]: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity", they write (*DE*, p. 131). And of Tillich, Adorno said that he was a person who always "gained himself" by "throwing himself away" in the fashion meant by the theological concept of kenosis (*Enttäusserung*). See *WW*, p. 25.

13. *DE*, p. 3.

harness the powers of the mythical gods and then discovers that the power proves illusory. The gods can be destroyed only by technology, which sees through the illusion of mythical powers because they do not work.

In this regard, the new science already outlined by Francis Bacon had no more use for such metaphysical concepts as substance and accident that still reflected a sense of the createdness of the world than it had for the mythical gods. Indeed, the enlightenment saw in metaphysical philosophy the same motive of fear at work as in the myths: the fear of demonic spirits that men tried to employ ritually to influence nature. But enlightenment erects its own totality, the unity and totality of a system whose "ideal is the system from which all and everything follows"¹⁴. That is as true of empiricism as it is of rationalism. It is not surprising, then, if the results of enlightenment and myth coincide. Enlightenment explains every event as the repetition of a law; but that is also the principle of myth, in which events are the continual repetition of the stories that have already been told of the gods. Enlightened common sense has it that nothing new ever happens, no new thought is ever formed, and everyone is intent on self-preservation by adaptation. Mythical wisdom has it that the eternal past is always being remade. Myth and enlightenment are both prompted by the desire to eliminate fear. Myth does it by means of the gods, fixing the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known by giving a name to the occurrence of the unusual. Enlightenment does it by denying that there is anything outside the immanence of knowledge; in its extreme form, it is positivism. "Nothing at all may remain outside because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear."¹⁵ This kinship in motive and aim explains why technical reason must totally replace the myths whose meaning contemplative reason can still recover at least aesthetically.

It is clear from this brief résumé of a theme in the dialectic of enlightenment that the Frankfurt School's concept of enlightenment is something other than what Kant meant by the word in "Was ist Aufklärung?" For Kant, enlightenment had meant the right and capacity to think for oneself; for Adorno and Horkheimer, the concept is allied specifically with technology. It means a way of thinking that aims at control and secures control by calculability. A condition of it is the disenchantment of the world, disabusing oneself of the belief that there are subjective powers out there in the world other than those which are, like us, human beings. The only subjects to which deeds can be ascribed are human subjects. The rest works by its own causality, which can be discovered and used for control. The dialectic of enlightenment lies in the fact that the resources it uses against the power of the mythical gods are the very ones which alienate it from the world. But enlightenment *can* proceed because myth itself produces the means for its transmutation into metaphysics and technology. Myth produces the Olympian gods. But those gods already have in them the principles that can be extracted as scientific and finally technological concepts. Once they are extracted, the myths themselves are left as nothing but pure fancy. If the first stage of the extraction is accomplished in part by pre-Socratic cosmology and in part by the Platonic ideas, where all concepts are half mythical and half philosophical, the

14. *DE*, p. 7.

15. *DE*, p. 16.

next stage begins with Bacon and modern science, when it is recognized that such philosophical categories as substance and quality are not attributes of things in the world but conceptual reflections of mythically intuited powers. The last category to yield may be that of causality, which seems still to be applicable to things in the world, but it too yields to the same extraction, as Hume's skepticism attested. "Myth turns into enlightenment", as Adorno and Horkheimer put it, "and nature into mere objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them."¹⁶

We shall not ask here whether the essence of science is technology, as the Frankfurt School maintained in alliance with the Heidegger for whom otherwise it had little use. That is a question of its own. But one cannot fail to notice how many echoes there are in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of Tillich's 1926 essay on the technological city ("Die technische Stadt als Symbol"), although there are no references to that essay and the analysis of technological advance that it provided was not unique to it. Nor can one fail to notice how Schelling's philosophy of myth is in the background. But there is a difference. Schelling traces a course from mythology to revelation which, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is traced as a course from mythology to technology. In any case, our purpose, while retracing the progress of enlightenment in Adorno and Horkheimer's work, has not been to show dependence upon Tillich and Schelling. Rather, we have had in view a second question of totality. It is the totality which enlightenment cannot but destroy, the totality of being which is the unity of intuition and concept in a language that can be both image and sign of reality and which technology brings to an end. Enlightenment dissolves the unity, separating the concept from the intuition (or perception) of the self-same object, and the word as sign from the word as image. That art tries to restore the unity is what makes it suspicious to enlightened realists. For, like enchantment, art posits its own closed world; it "is in the nature of a work of art, or aesthetic semblance, to be what the new, terrifying occurrence became in primitive magic: the appearance of the whole in the particular"; and, as "an expression of totality, art lays claim to the dignity of the absolute"¹⁷. Some philosophies — Schelling's, for example — may see art as having precedence over conceptual knowledge for this very reason. But the bourgeois world thinks otherwise.

If art cannot restore the lost unity of percept and concept in language as image and sign, can a symbol do so? On this Tillich and the Frankfurt School part. There is little in the analysis of technology given by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with which Tillich disagrees. In his *Systematic Theology*, he even refers explicitly to Horkheimer's related work which bears the title *The Eclipse of Reason*. He differs from them, however, in seeing in symbols a possibility that art does not offer. Symbols too create totalities, unities of percept and concept, of image and reality, but not necessarily in the self-enclosed world of aesthetic works. Real

16. *DE*, p. 9

17. *DE*, p. 19.

symbols — which is what Tillich meant by religious symbols in contrast with aesthetic or other symbols — are images of meanings which are also realities, and they are realities which are also images of meaning. They are totalities, not fabricated syntheses of objects and meanings. But, unlike works of art, their world is not at a distance from the real world. There is no symbolic distance comparable to aesthetic distance. Horkheimer on at least two occasions, offered an assessment of this concept of symbol. He was of the opinion that it permitted a reconciliation of knowledge and proclamation more adequate than could be accomplished by a *doctrina fidei*, that is, a conceptual statement of the content of faith put forth as teaching, or, in other words, a philosophical version of the propositions of faith. At the same time, he thought that the reconciliation between the two, between proclamation and science, had less significance today than in the sixteenth century because religion has in the meantime been separated from domination¹⁸. His basic objection, however, was that the doctrine of symbolism may be only a provisional rescue of religion. The problem which he saw in theological symbols is that we do not know what the symbol God symbolizes. This is a question which, according to his own testimony, he frequently discussed with Tillich in what Tillich called “the eternal conversation”¹⁹ and one to which, it seems clear, he did not find a satisfactory answer.

Horkheimer’s may sound like the standard objection to symbols, to which Tillich had many an occasion to reply. But let us review it briefly in order to see the nature of the objection. A national flag can be a symbol, Horkheimer explained, because we can say what country it represents. But religious symbols, as Tillich defined them, seem to be like flags representing countries no one knows or can name. The problem Horkheimer has in mind is clear. If we were presented with three different flags of three different countries but were told that no one could name the countries or could even be certain that there were any such countries, we could hardly regard these three flags as national symbols. We would have no way of discerning in them anything more than their own elements, the cloth out of which they were made, the colors, the shapes, and the like. We could not distinguish the three flags from one another as symbols just because they would all symbolize an unknown, nor could we distinguish flags as symbols from flags as only flags. Of what significance can they be as symbols if one does not know what they symbolize? Art restores totality by setting up its own world aesthetically distant from the real world. That very distance from reality is what makes art suspect and its reality only quasi real. In order to be real, or true, symbols cannot be in a world of their own; otherwise, they suffer from the aesthetic distance characteristic of art. One has to be able to say what a given symbol symbolizes independent of the symbol itself. “A symbol”, Horkheimer wrote in 1971, “about which one hasn’t any idea what it is a symbol for lacks what is most important: significance.”²⁰ That is the reason why he was not convinced that the concept of symbol, when it is applied to God, could withstand a critique.

18. *WW*, p. 128.

19. *WW*, p. 129; see *GW XIII*, p. 569.

20. *WW*, p. 569.

It would be interesting at this point, though not very useful, to conjecture about the contents of the “eternal conversation” between Tillich and Horkheimer. For it seems clear that Tillich’s writings do provide answers to just the question of reference that Horkheimer raises. If such answers were part of their continuing conversation, one must conclude that Horkheimer remained unconvinced by them. But for what reasons? One of Tillich’s answers would, to be sure, only add fuel to Horkheimer’s suspicions. It is found in the *Dynamics of Faith* in a wording that appears only there, when Tillich writes, in what he calls a “seemingly cryptic statement”, that God is a symbol of God²¹. Read it with an exclamation mark: God is a symbol of God! There, if anywhere, we have an assertion of the very thing Horkheimer criticized. Apart from this statement, which might only confirm Horkheimer’s doubts about the tenability of theological symbols, Tillich’s replies to the question of the reference of symbols are never tautological. Indeed, it seems clear that the very correlation of theology with ontology, of symbols with concepts, which Tillich developed as the method of his systematic theology, makes it possible to formulate in a nontautological and precise way what the symbol of God symbolizes and to do so independently of the symbolic world itself. The symbol of God *symbolizes* the very same as what is *conceived* in the concept of being-itself. A symbol comes at us, *geht uns an*; a concept grasps what it is that comes at us or is before us. The symbol God is not a concept, and the concept of being-itself is not a symbol. But what the symbol symbolizes is what is conceived as being-itself, and what the question of being asks about is symbolized as God. The sense of Tillich’s assertion that God is being-itself is not that being-itself is predicated of God, as a quality is predicated of a subject; being-itself does not define what God is. Rather, being-itself is the concept which grasps that which the symbol of God symbolizes. The concept of being-itself grasps that which we are always asking when we ask any question at all. But there would be nothing to grasp with that concept if there were no symbol of God. The symbol of God without the concept of being is as a reality without a sense; the concept of being without the symbol of God is as a sense without a reality. Surely, one of the reasons for Tillich’s having a method which correlates two irreducibles, the concept of being and the symbol of God, is that such a dual origin of cognition makes it possible not only to answer the question of being but also to identify the symbol of God. Correlation does not restore the lost totality in which intuition and concept were once joined in the word as image and sign of the presence of the real. It is, rather, a method of referring to each other the symbol which intuits a reality that cannot be defined and the concept which defines a reality that cannot be intuited.

The *effect* of a symbol does not, of course, depend upon whether we can say what it symbolizes. That is true of all symbols. A flag, as a national symbol, can have the effect of a symbol even when we cannot say what it symbolizes. It can in its effect upon people be more than the cloth that can be seen and touched and handled. Horkheimer hardly denies that possibility. Indeed, that is the origin of the magical and enchanting. But the question he puts to Tillich is whether a symbol of that kind, a symbol whose effect we can ascertain but whose reference we cannot conceive,

21. *Dynamics of Faith*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1958, p. 46.

amounts only to a remnant or resurgence of enchantment — whether, in other words, it can save religion from the sterility of doctrine but only for a while. A flag can be burned. If we know what the flag symbolized, we also know whether burning the flag destroys or attacks the country symbolized, and we need not think that burning the symbol is destroying the symbolized reality. If we know of a symbol only *that* it symbolizes but not *what* it symbolizes, its effect is the same as that of enchantment and magic, and the end of the symbol is the end of the reality symbolized. That is perhaps the deep truth in Johann Rist's Good Friday hymn, from the seventeenth century, which has in it the words, "Gott selbst liegt tot". The *tiefste Not* came from the complete coinciding of the symbol and symbolized. When the matter is put in this way, we can understand why Horkheimer, who did not think it possible to define what is symbolized in the symbol of God, could not be convinced that Tillich's notion of religious symbols was capable of providing more than a temporary halt to the corrosive force of enlightenment. If a symbol can be defined only by the effect it has upon those for whom it is a symbol, it cannot in the end be distinguished from the magical and enchanting; or, in other words, it cannot in the end withstand its logical critique.

III. CONCLUSION

The thesis I have undertaken to present in the preceding paragraphs can be summarized, then, in two parts.

1. That self-inclusion is a problem in principle for systematic totalities was recognized by critical theory as well as Tillich. Critical theory thought the solution lay in restricting critique always to specific points of realities. But this solution is admittedly powerless against the corrosiveness of critique itself. Tillich saw the solution in the paradox of an antinomy that creates a new reality through its own contradiction.

2. That critique as enlightenment disrupts, and cannot restore, the unitary understanding of being, both Tillich and the critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledge. But Adorno and Horkheimer saw only false or, at best, provisional solutions, such as those of aestheticized science or intellectualized art, to the disruption of enlightenment. Tillich saw in the reality of symbols a unity of sense and thought capable of passing through enlightenment with a new power of being.