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## TILLICH, ADORNO, AND THE DEBATE ABOUT EXISTENTIALISM

Guy B. HAMMOND

*RÉSUMÉ.* — On veut montrer ici que Paul Tillich et Théodore Adorno se sont engagés dans un dialogue important à propos de leur évaluation de l'existentialisme et de ses principaux protagonistes, Kierkegaard et Heidegger. L'examen de cette thèse se fait à partir d'une sélection d'écrits de Tillich et d'Adorno. La comparaison entre La décision socialiste de Tillich et le Kierkegaard d'Adorno trouve un point commun dans le thème de l'attente et de l'espérance. On trouve aussi dans les publications de cette même période un débat sur le concept de l'«essence» humaine. Les références plus récentes de Tillich à la pensée existentialiste manifestent l'influence de la première critique de l'existentialisme faite par Adorno, alors que celui-ci n'inclut pas la perspective de Tillich dans sa dernière critique. On en conclut que les différences marquées et persistantes entre ces deux auteurs ne doivent pas cacher l'importance de leurs points communs.

*SUMMARY.* — It is argued that one realm of discourse where Paul Tillich and Theodor Adorno engaged in significant dialogue with each other was in their assessments of existentialism and of its leading proponents, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. This thesis is explored through an examination of selected publications of Tillich and Adorno. A comparison of Tillich's *The Socialist Decision* and Adorno's *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* finds a common focus on the theme of expectation/hope. A debate regarding the concept of a human "essence" is found in publications of the same period. Tillich's later use of the existentialist perspective is found to reflect aspects of Adorno's early critique of existentialism, and Adorno's later critique is shown not to include Tillich's particular version. It is concluded that although differences remained between them, these should not blind us to significant commonalities.

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Paul Tillich and Theodor Adorno are both acknowledged to be among the intellectual leaders of our time — figures who initiated major tendencies of 20th century thought. Because of their prominence any evidence of significant influence of either

upon the other will be of interest to the scholarly community. Since the fact of their friendship over the years, both in Frankfurt and in New York City, is well known, the question naturally arises: was there any substantial influence of either upon the other? Did their personal interactions have any appreciable effect on their philosophical or theological formulations? Since Tillich was already a mature, widely-published scholar when the much younger Adorno turned up as one of his graduate students in Frankfurt, can evidence of an elder mentor be detected in Adorno's writings? Or did the brilliant student in time come to have a major impact on his former professor?

Some analysts have concluded that there was no significant intellectual influence of Tillich on Adorno. Susan Buck-Mors, in a study of Adorno entitled *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, expresses the view that "Tillich's intellectual position was quite different, and he cannot be said to have influenced Adorno. Their relationship was a personal one"<sup>1</sup>. Martin Jay's *Adorno* conveys a similar impression<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, few accounts of Tillich's theology list Adorno among those exerting a major influence on Tillich<sup>3</sup>. Are these assessments correct? What if anything did these two have in common beyond their "personal relationship"? In order to explore this question I propose to look at the ways in which Tillich and Adorno dealt with the perspective known as existentialism and with its leading figures (primarily Kierkegaard and Heidegger). I believe that the debates about existentialism and whether an existentialist ontology is possible and desirable proved to be one area where their interaction with each other was important for both. This is not to say that they agreed on all counts, but that each took significant account of the perspective represented by the other. At the very least I claim that setting their views on these issues in juxtaposition clarifies the positions of each.

#### 1. A COMPARISON OF ADORNO'S *KIERKEGAARD: CONSTRUCTION OF THE AESTHETIC* AND TILlich' *THE SOCIALIST DECISION*

I begin with a discussion of the doctoral dissertation written by Adorno under Tillich's supervision in 1930-31 and published in 1933: *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*. This difficult work has now been translated into English<sup>4</sup>. Probably the

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1. Susan BUCK-MORS, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*, New York, The Free Press, 1977, pp. 211 and 237.
  2. Martin JAY, *Adorno*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1984 Jay states that Tillich "nominally sponsored" Adorno's dissertation, p. 30.
  3. This gap is recognizable in the fact that Tillich's relation to Heidegger is always discussed in the literature on Tillich, but the Neo-Marxist criticism of Heidegger — which Tillich agreed with — is seldom given careful attention. Cf. eg. Alexander MCKELWAY, *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, New York, Delta Book, 1964, p. 27; Bernard MARTIN, *The Existentialist Theology of Paul Tillich*, New York, Bookman Associates, 1963, pp. 18, 26 and elsewhere. David HOPPER, in *Tillich: A Theological Portrait*, New York, J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1968, esp. 84; 96-100 gives a more nuanced discussion of Tillich's relation to Heidegger, but still without reference to Adorno. Ronald STONE, in *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought*, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1980, and John STUMME in *Socialism in Theological Perspective: A Study of Paul Tillich, 1918-1933* (Scholars Press, 1978) contribute to the overcoming of this omission.
  4. Theodor ADORNO, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

author's reputation for obscurity will only be enhanced in the English-speaking world by this translation. According to a recollection recorded in the Paucks' Tillich biography Tillich professed not to understand it<sup>5</sup>. But less than a year after its 1933 publication Tillich (already in the United States) wrote an especially clear and concise short review for the *Journal of Philosophy*<sup>6</sup>. Is there any evidence of Tillich as a dialogue partner in the writing of this book? Aided by a recent review by Jeanne Schuler, by the translator's Foreword, and by Tillich's review, I offer these tentative reflections<sup>7</sup>.

Adorno is intent on criticizing Kierkegaard, and hence existentialism, for offering in fact a new form of idealism. In an ascetic fashion Kierkegaard turns away from real life into a subjectivity that as Schuler puts it "leaves the world as it is"<sup>8</sup>. The subjective ego claims freedom from the world, but this claim cannot be taken at face value. It ignores the way in which consciousness is dependent upon objective factors. The anxieties and insecurities of the supposedly isolated self are actually the creation of particular social circumstances. Kierkegaard's construction of the self amounts to an idealist ontology where the self is pictured in retreat from history into an abstract "nature". And Adorno sees this "flight toward subjectivity" as, in the words of Tillich's review, at the same time "a flight into the prehistoric regions of myth"<sup>9</sup>.

Alongside this static ontology of subjectivity, however, Adorno finds something else more fragile and fleeting. In the melancholy of the aesthetic he finds alongside of the "defiant self assertion" of "autonomous subjectivity" a shattered, melancholic subjectivity. Melancholy, says Adorno, appears early and late in Kierkegaard "breaking through the foundation of subjectivity and polarizing itself objectively into judgment and grace"<sup>10</sup>. "Its ruins", he says, "are the ciphers on which Kierkegaard reflects, and hope (*Hoffnung*) is integral to the absurdity of its desire."<sup>11</sup> The longing found here is not for the restoration of a "lost immediacy" but for an impossible yet promised future fulfillment. Commenting on Kierkegaard's assertion in the fragmentary "Diapsalmata" that "my soul has lost its potentiality", Adorno explains: "Such potentiality is not so much a mirage of what has been lost as an unfulfilled, thin, prophetic, but nevertheless exact scheme of what is to be. [...] In contradiction to the superficial intention of systematic completeness, the 'Diapsalmata' work toward the 'original script of human existence'."<sup>12</sup> Adorno proceeds to describe two different responses to these traces and fragments of a longed-for happiness. "Endless, useless reading" of these signs is the "empty infinity of the reflection of the 'aesthetic' [...] individual which can be broken only by 'decisiveness'" ; yet for Adorno there is no surer escape

5. Wilhelm PAUCK and Marion PAUCK, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought*, Vol. I: Life, New York, Harper and Row, 1976, p. 116.

6. *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Aesthetischen*, Reviewed by Paul TILlich, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. xxxi, No. 23 (Nov. 8, 1934), p. 640.

7. Cf. Jeanne A. SCHULER, "Adorno's Kierkegaard" in *Telos*, 69 (Fall, 1989), pp. 191-196.

8. SCHULER, "Adorno's Kierkegaard", p. 193.

9. TILlich, *Kierkegaard*, p. 640.

10. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 123.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

from despair. In the following poetic passage Adorno locates Kierkegaard's hope in a longing for a never-yet-realized but promised happiness.

Yet no truer image of hope can be imagined than that of ciphers, readable as traces, dissolving in history, disappearing in front of overflowing eyes, indeed confirmed in lamentation. In these tears of despair the ciphers appear as incandescent figures, dialectically, as compassion, comfort, and hope. Dialectical melancholy does not mourn vanished happiness. It knows that it is unreachable. But it knows also of the promise (*Versprechen*) that conjoins the unreachable, precisely in its origin, with the wish. [...] Such hope rejects all mythical deception, all claim to having once existed, by this *never* [S.K.'s "never have I been happy"]: it is promised as unattainable; whereas, if it were directly asserted as reality, it would regress to the mythological and phantasmagorical, surrendering itself to the lost and past. [...] Although the wish that follows this aim [of an eternal happiness without sacrifice] is unfulfillable and yet full of hope, it originates in its aim. [...] Accordingly, in Kierkegaard homesickness for happiness answers the disguised utopian wish as the eschatological rescue of his gnosis: "the trick would be to feel homesick notwithstanding one is at home".<sup>13</sup>

It is possible to recognize in Adorno's ode to melancholy (*Schwermut*) overtones of Tillich's discussion of the way prophetic "expectation" tears consciousness away from the "myth of origin"<sup>14</sup>. I believe that the thread of Adorno's "research of hope" which runs through the Kierkegaard volume<sup>15</sup> is matched by the thread of expectation which runs through Tillich's *The Socialist Decision*. A note on the publication history of these two works is in order. Stumme tells us that Tillich wrote the bulk of his book in the summer of 1932<sup>16</sup>. Tillich says in his Foreword that it grew out of lectures given in October, 1931, and more generally "from many years of preoccupation with the problem of socialism, and from the joint labors of friends and working groups in Berlin and Frankfurt"<sup>17</sup>. Adorno had been acquainted with the writings of Kierkegaard for some years when he wrote his dissertation in 1930/31. The book was thoroughly revised (though the basic ideas remained unchanged), Robert Hullot-Kentor tells us, in September and October of 1932<sup>18</sup>. Thus the two books took final form at virtually the same moment, after several years of gestation in both cases. And the books shared a similar fate: coming out at the very time that Hitler came to power they both fell from sight until the post-war period.

What were the origins of their mutual interest in the orientation of life toward an imagined future? I do not feel prepared to answer this question, but I offer the following observations. John Stumme tells us that Tillich began using the theme of expectation

13. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

14. Cf. e.g. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, pp. 20-23. Tillich generally uses the term *Erwartung* rather than *Hoffnung* which is used by Adorno (see *The Socialist Decision*, p. 105 where Tillich explains that *warten* is a passive waiting while *erwarten* is awaiting, a more active verb. However, at p. 69 he uses *Hoffnung*.) Tillich and Adorno both use the verb *verheissen*, to promise.

15. Cf. the use of the phrase "research of hope" in application to Adorno by Robert Hullot-Kentor, in the translator's Foreword, p. xxi. Both Tillich and Adorno are attempting to discover a means of uniting transcendence and immanence: compare Tillich, pp. 110-111 with Adorno, pp. 68-69.

16. STUMME, *Socialism in Theological Perspective: A Study of Paul Tillich 1918-1933*, p. 100.

17. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

18. ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, p. xx.

“around 1929”<sup>19</sup>; it is central to several essays of his Frankfurt period. Tillich would not have been influenced by Adorno this early, while it is quite possible that Adorno knew Tillich’s essays. Both were attracted to heterodox Marxists like Ernst Bloch (both knew his work *Spirit of Utopia*). It seems clear that Adorno was influenced in his meditations on hope by Walter Benjamin<sup>20</sup>. An investigation of the roots of expectation in Tillich and hope in Adorno would be an interesting project.

Adorno’s book is a critique of Kierkegaard’s existential ontology of subjectivity; Tillich’s a critique of the bourgeois principle of individualism. The former book focuses on individual consciousness; the latter on political and social issues. But both draw a contrast between supposedly autonomous individuals trapped in abstraction, myth, and repetition, on the one hand, and on the other hand individuals — fragmented but future-oriented — who are open to hope and to reconciliation.

In Adorno’s book the content of hope derives from the realm of the aesthetic, from fantasy<sup>21</sup>, but for Adorno the aesthetic and the religious converge<sup>22</sup>. Hullot-Kentor makes the following rather startling contribution to the debate about the place of religion in Adorno’s work: suggesting that Adorno dropped certain theological motifs in the revised 1932 version of his Kierkegaard book, Hullot-Kentor continues: “This, however, is more of a sublimation than excision, for theology is always moving right under the surface of all of Adorno’s writings. [...] Opaque ideas in Adorno (as in Benjamin) often become immediately comprehensible when grasped in this context of theological interests. The idea of ‘truth-content’ for example, which has remained so obscure, is a work’s content of hope.”<sup>23</sup> Now I am sure that this judgment will be disputed by other Adorno scholars. But it reopens the question of the extent to which Adorno at some deeper level took theology (and perhaps even Tillich’s theology) very seriously.

Tillich’s book sets out to explore the roots of political thinking, both bourgeois-capitalist and socialist. But questioning the roots of thinking (which might be called ideology critique) leads to questions of human being, to a doctrine of human nature. Finding themselves in existence, human beings ask about origins; in doing so they

19. STUMME, *Socialism in Theological Perspective*, p. 48.

20. For Tillich’s essays, cf. *Political Expectation* (New York, Harper and Row, 1971); BLOCH’s *Geist der Utopie* came out in a revised edition in 1923; for Bloch, cf. *Hope and its Hieroglyph: A Critical Decipherment of Ernst Bloch’s Principle of Hope*, by Richard H. Roberts (Scholars Press, 1990); Walter BENJAMIN’s *Goethes Wahlverwandschaften* (1922) concludes with reflections on hope: cf. BENJAMIN’S *Schriften*, Band Ein (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955), pp. 137-140. (For this reference and insight on the relations of Benjamin, Adorno, Bloch and Tillich I am grateful to Lucien PELLETIER. Cf. his unpublished essay, “Paul Tillich, Ernst Bloch, and the Metaphysical Meaning of Action”). Hartmut SCHEIBLE in a recent German work, *Theodor W. Adorno* (Hamburg, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), p. 67, suggests an influence of Bloch on Adorno’s Kierkegaard book, but it is not clear that this applies to the theme of “hope”. For Benjamin’s influence on Adorno here cf. Wayne W. Floyd, Jr., *Theology and the Dialectic of Otherness: On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno* (New York, University Presses of America, 1988), pp. 268-270.

21. ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 137-140.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 140. Scheible writes regarding this issue: “If [for Adorno] however the simple exhibition of images would already be a surety of salvation, then the original religious content is not secularized through art, but art is transformed into religion.” (ADORNO p. 68; my translation).

23. ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, p. xxi.

are led to “myths of origin” and to ontology<sup>24</sup>. “Ontology is the final and most abstract version of the myth of origin.”<sup>25</sup> By reopening the question of ontology (after Kant had sought to close this door in the 19th century), Tillich here may reveal the influence of Martin Heidegger in its early stages. By the early 1930s Tillich was beginning to absorb from Heidegger and others a doctrine of man which permitted a new post-Kantian ontology. Heidegger taught him, he says in a 1944 essay, that “the way to ontology passes through the doctrine of man”<sup>26</sup>. Already by 1932, however, this Heideggerian ontology was coming under fire from Tillich’s Frankfurt colleagues for its conservative, static, even reactionary implications. Tillich’s acknowledgement of the legitimacy of this criticism is visible in his association of ontology with the quest for origins and the myth of origin.

He proceeds by asserting that a doctrine of man which asks only about origins is incomplete. Human beings are not bound by origins; because they are free they must ask (unconditionally, as Tillich says) about goals as well. Is there a givenness to mankind’s destiny as well as its origin? *This* question was to become the crux of discussions with Adorno, for it leads to issues regarding myths and ontologies of human destiny. Tillich equivocates on the latter issue. He asserts that concepts derived from “expectation” “cannot be grasped ontologically”, because “the new being is intrinsically unontological”<sup>27</sup>. Yet he also states that ontology can be justified if “it has been broken by a philosophy of history”<sup>28</sup>. Heidegger failed to perceive this; he took account of time and historicity, but only abstractly, without reference to real history. Tillich begins to see Heidegger as Adorno would also see him: Heidegger ontologized Kierkegaard’s individual but was stuck with the privatized, solitary self. What was lacking in Heidegger, Tillich says in a 1935 essay, was the dynamic, historical-eschatological sense of Marxism<sup>29</sup>.

Adorno also equivocated on the issue of ontology in the Kierkegaard work. In one of the most dialectical passages in the book Adorno argues, against Heidegger, that it is a “misrepresentation” of Kierkegaard to find in him an existential-ontological interest. “Individual existence is for Kierkegaard the arena of ontology only because it itself is not ontological.”<sup>30</sup> But Adorno has not wholly given up on the “rescue of ontology”<sup>31</sup>. He writes: “Therefore it is not the total self and its total structure, but

24. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, pp. 2-3.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

26. TILlich, “Existential Philosophy: Its Historical Meaning”, in *Theology of Culture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 98.

27. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 20. Cf. Tillich’s 1927 essay, “Eschatologie und Geschichte”, where he discusses how time and decision break through the “circles of being” (*Seinkreises*). (*Gesammelte Werke*, VI, esp. p. 77) I am indebted to Professor Jean Richard for this reference.

28. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 166, n. 6.

29. TILlich, “The Christian and the Marxist View of Man”, December, 1935, Harvard Paul Tillich Archives, p. 9.

30. ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 70-71.

31. Hullot-Kentor’s phrase, in ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, XXI.

exclusively the fragment of collapsing existence, free of all subjective 'meaning', that is a sign of hope; its fault lines are the true ciphers, at once historical and ontological."<sup>32</sup>

Adorno was to move further away from this position later; Tillich was to return to it. Tillich's *The Socialist Decision* is historically concrete; Adorno's *Kierkegaard* is more abstract. Tillich's expectation leads to specific moral action in a crisis situation: the unconditional decision for socialism. Thus hope for Tillich here leads out of endless repetition and into ethical decision (yet without utopian illusions). Adorno, overtly analyzing a 19th century thinker, in fact has in view a critique of a 20th century example of ontological abstraction. By implication he portrays Heidegger's philosophy as one that leaves persons trapped in subjectivity without the shards of hope found in Kierkegaard. As Buck-Mors and Schuler suggest, Adorno's broader aim was "to deflect the swelling interest in existentialism to Marxism"<sup>33</sup>. But if so he takes a strange approach. The delineation of hope in Adorno's *Kierkegaard* leaves it fragile and ephemeral, without roots in any firm reality. Only in fantasy — another subjectivity, although Adorno attempts to find objective elements in it — is there a prospect of reconciliation.

The association of ontology with static myth was one that Tillich would later abandon. Some have argued that when Tillich later attempts to encompass eschatology within ontology he loses the forward-looking tension and concreteness of *The Socialist Decision*<sup>34</sup>. In that work transcendence is associated with the future: time is given priority over space. When eschatology is again subordinated to ontology, the reverse may happen, and the consequence may once again be abstractness and myth.

## II. THE DEBATE ABOUT A HUMAN ESSENCE

The debate about a human "essence" engaged in by Tillich and Adorno is closely related to the above concerns. This was to be a bone of contention not only between Tillich and Frankfurt School members but also within the School as well. Tillich asserts the need for a concept of essence (without, we might add, clarifying how it could be un-ontological)<sup>35</sup> and defends it against its critics. His principal antagonist on this matter was surely Adorno, as can be seen from Adorno's treatment of the matter in his first professorial lecture, "The Actuality of Philosophy", delivered in 1931 (while he was engaged in writing the Kierkegaard work). Regarding ontology, Adorno asserts in that lecture: "The idea of being has become powerless in philosophy; it is nothing more than an empty form-principle whose archaic dignity helps to cover any content whatsoever."<sup>36</sup> It is clear that he has Heidegger most immediately in mind here. It is as if he criticizes Tillich by anticipation. He goes on to suggest that Heidegger "falls back on precisely the latest plan for a subjective ontology produced by Western

32. Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, p. 139, cf. p. 138.

33. Schuler, *Adorno's Kierkegaard*, p. 192.

34. Cf. Stumme, *Socialism in Theological Perspective*, pp. 98, 237-241.

35. Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 5.

36. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", *Telos*, 31 (Spring, 1977), p. 120.



thinking: the existentialist philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard”<sup>37</sup>. And he accuses Heidegger of ontologizing time and history. Then after defending a Marxian dialectical materialism (more clearly than in the *Kierkegaard* book) he turns to the concept of man understood as an essence or ideal. He urges the divorce of philosophy from these “mythic archetypes”, even those “which psychoanalysis lights upon [...]”<sup>38</sup>. Next he recognizes an objection (quite likely, I think, to have been made by Tillich): “The central objection is that my conception, too, is based on a concept of man, a blueprint of Being (*Entwurf des Daseins*) [...]”<sup>39</sup> Adorno answers by admitting this charge, but argues that thought need not pursue its own presuppositions. He concludes: “The breaking of what is irreducible, however, occurs concrete-historically and thus it is history which retards the movement of thought to its presuppositions.”<sup>40</sup>

This resistance to philosophical anthropology and to a doctrine of essence was to characterize Adorno’s thought throughout his career. Horkheimer largely agreed, although he and Adorno were never reluctant to make normative judgments. Tillich sought to rebut their arguments. A case can be made that the following claim by Tillich was never effectively countered by Horkheimer or Adorno. (Fromm and Marcuse would have found it even more difficult to disagree.) Tillich writes:

Thus it is certainly not necessary to posit an eternal human nature; but it is necessary to understand humanity living in encounter and in history, as a unity, since otherwise nothing at all could be asserted, even about the most concrete historical phenomenon. Most significantly, every norm would thereby be invalidated. The passion with which representatives of this professedly radical historical form of thinking make value judgments — for example about capitalism — shows that they are by no means lacking in awareness of the normative dimension. On the contrary, they have a vision of human society in which the human being will find a better fulfillment than it does at present.<sup>41</sup>

I believe that Tillich felt he had won this argument with Adorno, even though the latter never capitulated. He had the early Marx on his side and even much in Freud could be coopted. And I am sure that he convinced Fromm, though never Adorno. Marcuse adopted positions similar to those of Tillich<sup>42</sup>.

### III. TILlich ON EXISTENTIALISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

With the issue of essence settled, Tillich might have found the key dialogue partner for Christian anthropology: the Western Marxism of the Frankfurt School. In an essay entitled “The Christian and the Marxist View of Man” (December 1935), Tillich refers to Max Horkheimer and the Marxist rejection of “the new German anthropology”

37. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

41. TILlich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 165, n. 7.

42. JAY, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1973), p. 274; HERBERT MARCUSE, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987). This work first appeared in 1932.

(mentioning Scheler and Heidegger), based on the fact that this anthropology is reactionary in failing to recognize that the self-contradictory actual world can “furnish no model”<sup>43</sup>. Tillich agrees; and citing a large Frankfurt School work about to appear (*Authority and the Family*), Tillich observes: “Even more important it is that in different places at present, particularly in the group of workers behind the *Zeitschrift fuer Sozialforschung* already mentioned, there is taking place a joining of Marxist and psychoanalytic ideas, with equally fertilizing effect on both.”<sup>44</sup> This kind of work leads Tillich to the following conclusion: “It may be maintained that Christianity, especially in its more prophetic types, and Marxism, especially in its original form in Marx himself, exhibit a close typological affinity.”<sup>45</sup> For a constructive dialogue to occur, thinks Tillich, “Christianity would have to understand Marxism as the prophetic-immanent element of its own essence, become independent and driven into opposition; and to search for a way of receiving it again into itself. This [...] was the endeavor of religious socialism”<sup>46</sup>.

Now in the light of these observations and in the light of the major deficiencies uncovered in the “new German anthropology”, why wasn’t Critical Theory or Western Marxism the “good luck of Christian theology”? Why was existentialism chosen by Tillich instead of Critical Theory for purposes of the description of human existence? In one sense we know the answer: there was no popular “market” for Marxism in the States in the forties and fifties. But this answer is insufficient. A native-born “existential analysis” was already emerging in the forties that Tillich was in a position to augment and bolster. Richard Niebuhr’s Taylor lectures of 1940, published in 1941 as *The Meaning of Revelation*, constitute existential analysis (which in the fifties we learned to call “social existentialism”) in everything but the name (the word “existential” — in quotes — is used by Richard Niebuhr only in the Preface<sup>47</sup> and without reference to Kierkegaard, Heidegger, or Freud). But Tillich in a review of this book states: It is “a book with which I find myself in agreement as it rarely happens between theologians of a very different background, a book which is *the* introduction into existential thinking in present American theology”<sup>48</sup>. In those years Tillich was of the school of thought which says: if you can’t lick them, then join them.

But Tillich was not so easily “licked” either. Instead of advocating Critical Theory over existentialism, he includes the former in the latter. Was he the first to include Marxian and Freudian analysis under the rubric of existentialism? I can’t document any such claim, but he was surely one of the most prominent of those who did so. Someone might look at his essays on Kierkegaard of 1942, and his articles on existentialism of the forties, to see the extent to which Tillich incorporated Adorno’s critique in his evaluation of the existentialists. On the other side, one wonders what Adorno’s reaction was to this grouping of Marx together with Heidegger.

43. TILlich, “The Christian and the Marxist View of Man”, p. 1.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

47. Richard NIEBUHR, *The Meaning of Revelation*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1952, p. VII.

48. TILlich, “Existential Thinking in American theology”, n.d., Harvard, Paul Tillich Archives.

In a 1953 essay entitled "The Person in a Technical Society"<sup>49</sup> Tillich gives an account of existentialism as he then understood it. Describing it as a movement which "rebels in the name of personality against the depersonalizing forces of technical society"<sup>50</sup>, Tillich proceeds to characterize its "lonely prophets of the 19th century": Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. His account of Kierkegaard shows evidence of Adorno's influence. Kierkegaard is pictured as protesting the loss of the existing individual in the world process as described by Hegel. Hegel's system is identified as the "idealistic mirror of technical society", a metaphor which may have been drawn from Adorno's discussion of the "mirror" of the bourgeois apartment in his *Kierkegaard* work<sup>51</sup>. Tillich's critique of the Kierkegaardian "leap" is Adorno-esque: "[The individual] is free in the moment of his leap. But his leap into freedom involves the sacrifice of his freedom. The power of technical society is manifest in this conflict between rational necessity and the leap of freedom. The person is lost if rational necessity prevails. He tries to save himself by the leap which, however, leads to new forms of servitude, natural or supernatural ones."<sup>52</sup> Thus Tillich agrees with Adorno's conclusion that the Kierkegaardian leap is "more an expression of despair than an answer"<sup>53</sup>.

Next Marx is brought on the scene by Tillich as an existentialist who gives not an idealistic mirroring of technical society but a "realistic description". "Marx saw much more clearly than Kierkegaard that it is not a system of thought but the reality of modern society which is responsible for the reduction of the person to a commodity."<sup>54</sup> Clearly Tillich's version of existentialism here takes on aspects which make it much less vulnerable to Adorno's criticism (but perhaps at the risk of blurring its outlines). In any case the ambiguities and failures of subsequent Marxism indicate that it too is an unsatisfactory answer to "dehumanization".

Nietzsche and the philosophy of life movement (Tillich groups psychoanalysis under this rubric) "saw more sharply than did Kierkegaard and Marx the deepest roots of the dehumanizing and depersonalizing tendencies of modern society"<sup>55</sup>. Looking for "some unity below the split into subject and object" they found the unconscious, the instincts, the demonic, also repression, anxiety, and compulsion. By his inclusion of depth psychology in existentialism Tillich overturns the concentration on individual consciousness usually identified with this school of philosophy, the theme which Adorno attacks most relentlessly.

The concluding section of Tillich's essay introduces an element of confusion into his definitions. He speaks here of "three great movements of protest against dehumanization": the movements for creative life (existentialists show up here); the move-

49. TILlich, "The Person in a Technical Society", in *Varieties of Modern Social Theory*, ed. by Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1963.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

51. ADORNO, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 40-46.

52. TILlich, "The Person in a Technical Society", p. 259.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

ments for social justice (bourgeois revolutionaries, social critics, and Marx), and Christian and other movements which “partly in dependence on Kierkegaard” have discovered man’s “estrangement from the ground of his being and meaning”<sup>56</sup>. Whether all three of these movements are to be called existentialist is less clear than one might have expected. Rather, the effort to coordinate these three great movements in order to deepen our comprehension of the individual in modern society sounds much more like the project of the Institute for Social Research as initially outlined by Max Horkheimer: the effort to develop a social philosophy which discovers connections between “the economic life of society, the psychological development of its individuals and changes within specific areas of culture” (i.e., science, art, religion, customs, etc. — in other words ideological change)<sup>57</sup>. This synthesis of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and culture criticism characterized the Frankfurt School early and late. Was Tillich an existentialist or a Critical Theorist?

#### IV. Adorno on Existentialism

Adorno in 1964 published *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: zur deutschen Ideologie (The Jargon of Authenticity)*<sup>58</sup>. The compounding of Adorno’s forbidding prose with that of Heidegger in this work does not make for light reading. (Nor does the fact that there are no chapter divisions in an essay of 165 pages.) The work concludes that German existentialism in the post-World War II years has become an ideology which mystifies actual social relations. For example Adorno quotes from an appreciative study of Heidegger that summarizes Heidegger’s treatment of man’s need for shelter: “[Heidegger] aims at this fundamental meaning of residing for all human existence, and in this remark he focuses on the ‘need for residences’ as one of the great difficulties of our time: ‘The true need for residences’, he says here, ‘consists not first of all in the absence of residences’ although this need should by no means be taken lightly; but behind this need a deeper one is hidden, that man has lost his own nature and so cannot come to rest. ‘The true need for residence consists in the fact that mortals must first learn to reside.’” Adorno comments: “that which announces itself, in the game about the need for residences, is more serious than the pose of existential seriousness. It is the fear of unemployment, lurking in all citizens of countries of high capitalism [...]. Angst [...] is historical [...]; it appears in fact that those who are yoked into a society which is [...] contradictory to the deepest core constantly feel threatened by what sustains them.”<sup>59</sup> This kind of criticism — following the general lines of his Kierkegaard critique but without finding in this literature those utopian ciphers that were glimpsed in Kierkegaard’s fantasy — is directed toward existentialism in general and Heidegger and Jaspers in particular.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 301-303.

57. Max Horkheimer, “The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research”, in *Critical Theory and Society*, ed. by Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner, New York, Routledge, 1989, p. 34.

58. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1973.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

Does Adorno include Tillich in this general condemnation? We may shed some light on this question by reflecting upon a possible allusion to Tillich in the text.

After a paragraph expressing distaste for the language of depth, Adorno has this to say about religion: "The jargon secularizes the German readiness to view men's positive relation to religion as something immediately positive, even when the religion has disintegrated and been exposed as something untrue. The undiminished irrationality of rational society encourages people to elevate religion into an end in itself, without regard to its content: to view religion as a mere attitude, as a quality of subjectivity. All this at the cost of religion itself. One needs to be a believer — no matter what he believes in."<sup>60</sup> In the Forward, the editor, Trent Schroyer, quotes Tillich to the effect that existentialism is a protest movement "against the dehumanization of man in industrial society"<sup>61</sup>, and then describes Adorno's book as a critique of the critique. Asserting with Adorno that the jargon of existentialism loses sight of the "objective context of human society" in its "compression of all historical consciousness into the sphere of self-experience", Schroyer finds that for illustration Adorno "cites Martin Buber's *I and Thou* and Paul Tillich's stress that religiosity is an end in itself". Both are "instances of the shift to subjectivity as an in-it-selfness. In both cases the words are referred to the immediacy of life, to attitudinal and qualificative aspects of self-experience. One needs only to be a believer; the objective content of belief has been eclipsed in the subjectivization of objective content"<sup>62</sup>.

So says Schroyer. But it is possible to find something a bit different in the passage quoted from Adorno. It may indeed allude to a tendency found in Tillich as well as elsewhere: "Society encourages people to elevate religion into an end in itself." But I believe it is significant that Adorno does *not* cite Tillich (here or elsewhere in the book). Buber is cited<sup>63</sup>; Heidegger and Jaspers are pilloried mercilessly in detail and at great length. And the passage referred to suggests that the loss of content with the accompanying irrationality is detrimental to true religion — an emphasis which Tillich sought, successfully or unsuccessfully, to uphold, as Adorno well knew. It must be remembered also that Adorno in fact wanted to acknowledge a "moment" of truth in the existentialist emphasis on subjectivity. In a later passage, speaking of the "inheritors" of Hegel and Kierkegaard, he writes:

[They] by slight of hand changed unhappy consciousness into a happy nondialectic one [...]. They cleanse inwardness of that element which contains its truth, by eliminating self-reflection [...]. The hardened inwardness of today idolizes its own purity, which has supposedly been blemished by ontic elements. At least in this regard the outset of contemporary ontology coincides with the cult of inwardness. The retreat of ontology from the course of the world is also a retreat from the empirical content of subjectivity.<sup>64</sup>

60. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

61. *Ibid.*, p. VII.

62. *Ibid.*, p. XIV.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

Would Adorno place Tillich in the “cult of subjectivity”? I think not (not the author of *The Socialist Decision*, and the essays of *The Protestant Era* and *Political Expectation*); he might have been willing, however, to warn his friend that at times he came perilously close.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

By the time of *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs* (1967), Adorno was able to recall Tillich’s “flirtation” with existentialism with bemusement and tolerance. Tillich’s tendency toward building a system, he noted, meant that “to this extent he stood against existentialism which interpreted individual being as the final norm, although [Tillich] occasionally flirted with Heidegger’s concepts”<sup>65</sup>. And again, Adorno says with sympathy that Tillich stood at “an extremely opposite pole from Karl Barth” in a way which brought out the existentialist tendency to “put the truth more in the solitary subject and in his connection to the truth”, rather than to attribute to it an objective character. Adorno then expressed his wonderment over the fact that “the authors of *The Courage to Be* and *The Jargon of Authenticity* could remain in close connection with each other. But Tillich meant something different. He meant something correct, something human. With him the repressive and the authoritarian were completely absent”<sup>66</sup>.

Differences remained between Tillich and Adorno, to be sure, though Susan Buck-Mors’ conclusion that they had nothing in common seems clearly incorrect. They did mean something different by the term “existentialism” but to some extent each formulated his position in response to the other. (Adorno indeed says that his book *Negative Dialectics* was directed against Tillich’s affirmations<sup>67</sup>.) The fact of differences between them should not blind us to significant commonalities.

65. *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch*, ed. by Max Horkheimer et al., Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967, p. 32. My translations here and below.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 34.