

## SELECTION FROM

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### CHAPTER 7 Historical precedents

In this chapter I will briefly discuss the similarities and differences between the classical theist conception of God and God conceived as identical to Logical Space, after which I will offer a few examples of historical precedents to this view. I do not claim that these historical precedents indubitably point to the view I have been arguing for. Rather, some aspects of them, although written in a totally different vocabulary than what I have been using here, do have a good deal of resemblance to Logical Pantheism. Given that Logical Pantheism contains elements from both Pantheism and Panentheism, resemblances with each of these shouldn't be surprising. However, the resemblances I want to point out are more specific and regard the original elements of Logical Pantheism, like the plenitude principle of Logical Totalitarianism, which is responsible for the idea of a god that transcends all descriptions and binary oppositions.

#### **18. The God of Theism versus Logical Space**

It is not hard to see how identifying God with Logical Space can accommodate several divine attributes that classical theists subscribe to. Considering a relative of Logical Pantheism, namely, a pantheism that identifies God with the set of all Lewis style, concrete possible worlds, Graham Oppy writes:

“Consider the modal-realist view mentioned above. Everything that can be done is done by some part of the thing of which every thing is a part—so there is a sense in which this being is omniscient. Every possible virtue is possessed by some part of the thing of which every thing is a part—so there is a sense in which this being is omnibenevolent. (Not quite the traditional sense, of course. After all, every possible vice is also possessed by some part of the thing of which everything is a part—so, in the same kind of sense, this being is omnimalevolent. Moreover, this remains true even if lots of apparently possible evil worlds are deemed impossible.) Every thing is located in the thing of which every thing is a part—so there is a sense in which this being is omnipresent. Provided that one is prepared to allow temporal parts into one's ontology, one can also get a sense in which the thing of which every thing is a part is omnitemporal. And so on. (Perhaps you could even make a case for the claim that the sum of possible worlds is a being than which no greater can be conceived: after all, on this view, there is no greater being to have conceptions of!)

Of course, this attempted rescue of traditional theism doesn't really fare all that well: it is often a mistake to attribute a property to a thing on the basis of the fact that the property is possessed by a part of the thing. Moreover, it is hard to see any sense in the suggestion that the sum in question is a person (which possesses typical personal attributes). However, pantheists are typically concerned to deny many of the central theses of traditional theism—including the claim that God is a person—so these failings should not seem to be too disturbing. Furthermore, this being has some other properties which should make it attractive to pantheists. In particular, it does have a special kind of

unity: the existence of its parts, and the relations which obtain between them, are all necessary and a priori. Even if this rather formal kind of unity is not what pantheists have in mind, it seems clear that the non-personal, immanent being which we have described here is a much better candidate for the pantheists' God than it is for the God of traditional theism." (1997: 329–330)

Similar to the view Oppy is discussing, Logical Pantheism has all these advantages over classical Pantheism, which identifies God with the actual world at most, and more typically with the universe. However, when it comes to comparing it with classical Theism, we have a range of possible views according as what one's doctrinal assumptions and goals are, for instance:

- that it is essentially different from theism, in that its notion of God is not personal, hence it should be *rejected* as not really being about God
- that it is similar enough to theism, in that, even if non-personal, it accommodates both necessary existence and the divine attributes, so it could or should *be interpreted as a version of theism*
- that it is essentially different from theism, but has the advantage of picking out the absolutely necessary being, so it should *replace* theism

I won't attempt to force Logical Pantheism into an alleged equivalence with Theism, insisting that in some way personhood is satisfied, for instance, by analogy as Mark Johnston claims, that the proposed notion of God is somehow similar to the personal notion:

“(…) we are forced to draw on analogy in thinking and speaking of the Highest One. The Love of the Highest One is analogized as its outpouring in ordinary existents, its Will as self-disclosure, its Mind as the most revealing presentations found in the realm of sense, and its Power as the totality of the laws of nature. In these respects, the Highest One has by analogy the characteristics of a person, but a person far removed from ordinary personality.” (p. 158)

What I want to argue for is, rather, that Logical Pantheism is, by definition, compatible with the *possibility* of Theism, when necessity of the theistic God is understood as local, that is, as necessity within a canonical logical space. The real issue is not whether these views are compatible—they obviously are. The person-God of theism does have place *within* Logical Space, and it will be locally necessary, that is, Logical Space will contain a region (a canonical logical space) that corresponds to Theism, which region will depict a person-God present in all possible worlds that compose that region. As mentioned in Chapter 3, section 5, Logical Space is nested, so that some regions are higher-order, they represented other lower-order regions including canonical logical spaces. Logical Space will represent the disagreement between Theism and Atheism as two canonical logical spaces each corresponding to one or the other of these views. Where Logical Pantheism will be different from Theism is in their views about where the *actual* world belongs. Theism will state that the actual world belongs to the theist canonical logical space. According to the theist, God actually exists. The logical pantheist will assert the possibility of God’s actual existence, that is, the possibility that the actual world belongs to the theistic canonical logical space, but will not believe, in the sense of 100% credence, that God actually exists. If my previous probabilistic arguments are right, we should believe that almost surely the theistic God is not actual, and that almost surely there are arbitrary many demigods in the actual world.

However, the logical pantheist might be someone who *hopes, wishes, desires* that the actual world contains the God of theism. Desiring that this be so is what makes the agnostic's prayer natural and meaningful. In Anthony Kenny's words:

“There is no reason why someone who is in doubt about the existence of God should not pray for help and guidance on this topic as in other matters. Some find something comic in the idea of an agnostic praying to a God whose existence he doubts. It surely is no more unreasonable than the act of a man adrift in the ocean, trapped in a cave, or stranded on a mountainside, who cries for help though he may never be heard or fires a signal which may never be seen.” (1979: 129)

Logical Pantheism is, then, obviously, in conflict with Atheism. The Atheist believes that the God of theism does not actually exist. Further, if we accept the claim that the God of theism is locally necessary, if she exists, then the atheist has to also accept that God is locally impossible. The logical pantheist is not committed to these claims; the actual world *might* contain the God of theism, and if it does contain her, then God is locally necessary, that is, the actual world belongs to the theist's canonical logical space. If the scenario in which the theistic God exists actually is true, Logical Pantheism will partially coincide with Theism, except that the theistic God won't be the highest being. This scheme, in effect, namely, a personal theistic type God coupled with a “philosophical”, more abstract type of God is what I will be looking for in the following admittedly brief and incomplete overview in the history of philosophical theology. It is important to mention that I have only selected those views that seem to subscribe to our construction principle of the plenitude, Logical Totalitarianism.

Otherwise, the view that there are two conceptions of God—God of Abraham and a God of the philosophers—would bring us virtually the whole history of philosophical theology.<sup>i</sup>

### 19. Pseudo-Dionysius The Areopagite

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD), or Denys for short, is known as a mystic and reformer of Neoplatonist theology. One of his well-known proposals, emerging as a way to express his exalted view about greatness of God, in his *Mystical Theology*, is a combination of cataphatic and apophatic methods of describing God. The cataphatic, or positive way, was the orthodox teaching of Christian theology, and is based on describing God via assertion, or more exactly via ascription of non-negative predicates to her. The apophatic, or negative way, was specific to early Christian theology of the Neoplatonist school, and is based on the idea that by asserting anything positive about God is tantamount to limiting her being, as our notions corresponding to these non-negative predicates are incapable of expressing the greatness of the corresponding qualities as they are present in God, hence we should describe by negation; we can only say what God is not. Whereas Neoplatonists thought that the negative way only applies to The One (their notion of God), and the positive way to created, finite beings, Denys introduces the idea that what properly applies to God is neither of them, and this is what we should say about God, viz. the “God is beyond assertion and denial”.<sup>ii</sup> Denys’ view is radical, especially when one considers that God is supposed to be even beyond existence and non-existence. Here are two passages when he makes this claim:

“[...] nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence;  
[...] nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it; for while applying

affirmations and negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as it transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature—free from every limitation and beyond them all.” (*Mystical Theology*, V transl. Rolt [1920] 2004)

For instance, they say concerning the Divine Unity, or Super-Essence, that the undivided Trinity holds in a common Unity without distinction Its Subsistence beyond Being, Its Godhead beyond Deity, Its Goodness beyond Excellence; the Identity, surpassing all things, of Its transcendently Individual Nature; Its Oneness above Unity; Its Namelessness and Multiplicity of Names; Its Unknowableness and perfect Intelligibility; Its universal Affirmation and universal Negation in a state above all Affirmation and Negation [...] (*The Divine Names*, II.4, transl. Rolt [1920] 2004)

Abstracting away from Denys’ central goal, that of expressing an exalted view of the greatness of God, and focusing on the purely logical structure of what he tries to express, I think that our notions of Logical Space and Logical Totalitarianism, together with the components of Logicalism, is an appropriate model for these puzzling assertions. Everything thinkable is relative, according to Denys; God from this point of view must be beyond the thinkable, because whatever is thinkable is thought in terms of affirmation and negation, but God is supposed to always transcend these. God is the only non-relative item, not even a being or non-being, which are themselves relative. Indeed, as Rolt ([1920] 2004: 70) notes:

"Yes" implies the possibility of "No," and "No" the possibility of "Yes." Thus "Yes" and "No" belong to the relative world. God's absolute existence is beyond such antithesis.

Another indication of this resemblance with our principle of plenitude, which makes it the case that Logical Space transcends even its own negation, is that Denys several times makes the puzzling claim that God “actually passes outside of Itself even while It remains all the time wholly within itself” (Rolt [1920] 2004: 15) The main goal of this claim is to express the idea that God is supposed to be both transcendent and immanent,<sup>iii</sup> and, following Neoplatonists, Denys usually talks about the transcendent God as emanating into the realm of relative existence thus being immanent as well. However, the idea of passing out of itself while remaining all the time wholly within itself is very much like the way we generate our plenitude via Logical Totalitarianism.

## **20. Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa**

Meister Eckhart (cca. 1260 – cca. 1327), German Dominican theologian and mystic, was considered a heretic and censored in his time, but the Catholic Church has been recently considering requests to rehabilitate him. Eckhart was influenced by Denys, and his writings contain paradoxical seeming statements meant to emphasize both the transcendence and immanence of God, such as that whereas of created things you can assert a difference, that is, something that differentiates them, of God you can only say he is, so he is indistinct (Turner 2009: 132).

In his *Granum Sinapis*, Eckhart writes:



“(O) Intellect!

The road leads you

Into a marvelous desert,

So broad, so wide,

It stretches out immeasurably.

The desert has

Neither time nor place,

Its mode of being is unique.” (In Bernard McGinn 2001: 38)

Here the transcendent aspect of God is emphasized, with God’s unique mode of being (absolute as opposed to relative) but Eckhart always couples such claims with claims that God is also immanent. Such passages have always been interpreted only as expressing the ineffability of God, a characteristic claim of mystics. However, the desert Eckhart is talking about “stretches out immeasurably”, so it looks as though it is something all-encompassing, but itself not existing in time and space, being beyond these categories. Eckhart also distinguishes sometimes between God and Godhead, the latter being the highest entity, The One, and the former most likely the person-God of orthodoxy and popular religion.

God being beyond all difference and sameness indicates similarity with our Logical Totalitarianism, the idea that Logical Space “survives” all partitioning by negation, even its own negation, which means the we can never have a final and complete idea of it—it transcends all spaces that we can generate by logical operations on propositions. At the same time, this does not mean that Logical Space is somehow empty; it means that it contains the largest plenitude whatsoever. Eckhart is many times interpreted as equating his transcendent God with nothingness, in a fashion similar to Buddhism. However, passages like the following show that he is closer to what I have just asserted about our Logical Space:

“So, when I think on God's Kingdom, I am compelled to be silent because of its *immensity*, because God's Kingdom is none other than God Himself with all His *riches*. God's Kingdom is *no small thing*: we may survey in imagination *all the worlds of God's creation*, but they are not God's Kingdom.” (Sermon II) (*My emphases*)

Eckhart's notion of God's Kingdom is not nothingness, ineffable obscurity, but rather “immensity”, “riches”, “no small thing”, and more than “all the worlds of God's creation”.

An even better example of similarities between the notions I have put forward and some historical theological writings is Nicholas of Cusa's account of God as the “Not-Other”. Here is a convoluted and cryptic quote from him that we could try to disentangle:

“Not Other is not an other, nor is it other than any other, nor is it an other in an other—for no other reason than that it is Not Other, which can in no way be other, as if it something were lacking to it, as to an other. For an other which is other than something lacks that than which it is other. But Not Other, because it is not other than anything, *does not lack anything nor can anything be outside it.*” (*De li Non Aliud/On the Not Other*, 1462, ch.6, quoted in Miller 2009) (*My emphasis*)

Perhaps it would be exaggerated if I said “obviously, Nicholas of Cusa is talking about Logical Space”, but you can't deny that there does seem to be a congeniality between this passage and our way to understand Logical Space. What, in effect, Nicholas wants to express is that God is a plenitude, it is not “an other” whatsoever. To be “an other” means to be distinct

and distinguishable in perception, imagination, or in mere conception, and God is beyond all such distinctions. Nicholas emphasizes that to be “an other” is to lack something relative to something else, which means that all existents except God are relative existents; this is similar to our thesis of Existential Relativity. God, on the other hand, is the only item that exists absolutely, which means that it is an absolute plenitude, does not lack anything. At the same time, this doesn’t mean that God is purely transcendent. God is manifested all over the plane of relative existence. Transcendence comes into the picture when one tries to imagine this item that is present beyond all possible distinction and partition, because such an item will be clearly imaginable only if one’s imagination is infinite, passing through an infinite hierarchy of partitioning one’s logical space; this hierarchy is what we called “nested logical spaces”.

## **21. Perennialism**

Perennialism, or Perennial Philosophy, was a movement within comparative religion, theology, and philosophy based on the core idea that there is a common cultural and philosophical ground to all mass religions across the millennia, and that one could discern the “true conception” of God by discovering this common ground. Although there are several instances of this idea in the history of religion and philosophy, I will only focus here on a 20<sup>th</sup> Century manifestation of it, in the writings of René Guénon, Frithjoff Schuon, and Sayyed Hossein Nasr, among others. Guénon and Schuon were Western converts to Islam, but their main interest in Islam was the mystical, and more precisely the Sufi esoteric sects within it. Nasr is an Iranian-born American philosopher of religion, continuing the Guénon line in the area of Sufi studies.

These recent perennialists distinguish the esoteric from the exoteric aspects of religion. The esoteric would, in fact, deal with the adequate notion of God, whereas the exoteric aspect is a “tamed” version, capable of appeal among the ordinary, “non-expert” believers. One of

the theses that Schuon, a scholar of comparative religion, repeatedly insists on is that the adequate notion of God involves both an immanent infinity component, which he calls “All-Possibility”, and a transcendent and non-dual absolute component, which he calls “Beyond-Being”. Schuon further relates these aspects to the *Atma/Maya* distinction in Hinduism:

“All-Possibility belongs to the Divine Essence itself, and the Essence comes “before” the Person; Beyond-Being—or Non-Being—comes “before” Being; the Supra-personal Divinity determines the Personal God, and not the other way round. [...] the Absolute by definition comprises the “energy” or “shakti” that is Infinitude, and, as All Possibility, it projects Relativity, *Māyā*. Now, the Personal God is the center or the very summit of this extrinsic dimension; far from being able to determine the Absolute-Infinite.” (1984)

The person-God is not the highest in the hierarchy of being that Schuon subscribes to. The highest is the couple Absolute-Infinite, that is, the beyond-being and the all-possibility. Again, these ideas look very similar to our ideas about Logical Space. Beyond-being is the transcendent aspect of Logical Space which we obtain by focusing on our method of generating the plenitude. All-possibility is rather like the orthodox notion of modal space, containing all possibilities.

Nasr’s way of expounding Schuon’s points fits even better with our ideas, as he clearly thinks that the absolute being, beyond-being, implies even its own negation as contained within it:

Ultimate Reality contains the source of all cosmic possibilities and in fact all possibilities as such even the metacosmic. God is infinite not only in the sense

that no limit can be set upon Him, but also in the sense that, as Ultimate Reality, He contains all possibilities. Metaphysically, He is the All-Possibility [...] The Divine contains all possibilities, *including the possibility of its own negation, without which it would not be infinite.* (1993: 9–10) (*My emphasis*)

This passage, especially the emphasized part, clearly points to how Logical Space is to be generated out of the plenitude principle of Logical Totalitarianism, which includes all propositions, even negations applied to Logical Space itself, like “Logical Space does not exist”, or “There is something besides Logical Space”. The transcendental generation rule behind Logical Totalitarianism ensures that all such propositions are in fact included in Logical Space itself. Nasr does not have qualms in equating the adequate conception of God with this space. Of course, he would also insist that God is at the same time the personal God of the “sacred scriptures”, but in my opinion such claims are unsubstantiated and, in fact, would subtract from the beauty and attractiveness of thinking of God in this purely abstract way as identical to something like Logical Space; adding the allegedly necessary person-God of the scriptures to this picture does not add any profundity and renders the view hard to sustain by argument, as we have seen when discussing the modal intuitions about the person-God and their effect on the ontological argument.

## **22. Paul Tillich**

One of the most well-known ideas of German-born American theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) is the so-called “God above God”. The God above God is the transcendent *ground of being*, so it is similar enough to what we have just discussed in guise of beyond-being. Tillich’s God above God is transcendent, and is needed in order to correct some of the problems with the standard theological person-God. Of course, the scheme

“transcendent/metaphysical God versus immanent/anthropomorphic God” is as old as theology, but Tillich puts forward some radical views in favor of the abstract metaphysical conception of God. For instance, he is critical of organized religion, based on the tendency of all religions to fail to live up to the requirement of epistemic humility regarding the nature of God, hence a tendency for unsubstantiated legalism and even idolatry. I will discuss these problems in the last section of the next chapter. More relevant for this section, Tillich puts forward a radical seeming claim, against what he calls “theological theism”,<sup>iv</sup> to the effect that it is even a category mistake to say that God exists, let alone to prove it:

The God of theological theism is a being beside others and as such a part of the whole reality. He certainly is considered its most important part, but as a part and therefore as subjected to the structure of the whole. He is supposed to be beyond the ontological elements and categories which constitute reality. But every statement subjects him to them. He is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which is related to a thou, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and an endless time. He is being, not being-itself. As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. And this is decisive for the necessity of transcending theological theism. For God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. [...] The ultimate ground for the courage to be is the “God above God”; this is the result of our demand to transcend theism. Only if the God of theism is transcended can the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness be taken into the courage to be. [...] absolute faith agrees with the faith implied in mysticism in that both transcend

the theistic objectivation of a God who is a being. (From *The Courage to Be*,  
quoted in F. F. Church 1999: 189–190)

Tillich's points bring forth a new aspect of our theorizing about Logical Space, namely, the motivation for identifying God in such a way as to accommodate the clear epistemic possibility that the traditional person-God does not actually exist. The most important ground for Tillich, as expressed in this passage, for the necessity of conceptualizing a God above the person-God is the reality of doubt, and, more in line with Tillich's existentialist commitments, the anxiety associated with the meaninglessness of life without such a superbeing. Although in the first place Tillich's argument is based on subjective data, the anxiety of the potential believer/disbeliever, he does derive ontological conclusions from it. The only notion of God that survives the natural, anxious, everyday doubts about the existence of divinity is the God that cannot be said to exist, because existence would put it within the order of other existents. In our terminology, existents within Logical Space are relative existents, they exist-relative-to-some-region. If existence is relative, then God cannot be said to exist, because that would make her one of the existents, hence, by negation not the absolute plenitude.

The heuristic consists of asking the question: which kind of God is compatible with doubt or with the epistemic possibility of the non-existence in the actuality of the God of theism? For this one does not need to have the kind of doubt that the atheist has; it is enough to doubt, for instance, that the God of theism is really good, that is, it is enough to believe that something almost like the God of theism actually exists, but doubt that her intentions and attitudes are good. For instance, while Tillich claims that Nietzsche's slogan "God is dead" should be interpreted as the disenchantment of the world with a person who appears as a cosmic tyrant, Mark Johnston offers an interpretation of the story of Job in the Bible,

according to which Job's unshaken faith shows that God cannot be identified with Yahweh, as the latter appears as an appalling individual:

“The meaning of the book of Job is not that we should keep our mouths shut up in the face of divine majesty and power; the meaning is the moral and religious irrelevance of Yahweh and all the putative Cosmic interveners. [...] Yahweh, along with all the putative Cosmic Intervenors, is rendered irrelevant by a faithfulness like Job's. Indeed, Job's trust looks as if it is already somehow directed toward a Higher One. Like Jeremiah, Job is already morally better than his God.” (2009: 159)

Here it is unshaken faith, that is, doubtlessness that makes it possible to interpret the book of Job as a story meant to call our attention to the transcendent, truly necessary God. Unlike in our discussion of the ontological argument, where we considered the modal intuition that the person-God possibly does not exist *per se*, here it is the intuition that the personal divinity one is looking for is possibly evil, thus pointing to the need to worship not such a god, but a suprapersonal (Tillich), transcendent, and/or impersonal God, whose existence is *a priori* knowable beyond any doubt.

### **23. John Hick**

John Hick (1922–2012) was an influential liberal theologian most well-known for his work on the need for a pluralistic hypothesis about religions, which he cashed out in terms of a Kantian scheme according to which there is a multitude of revealed manifestations of what Hick calls “The Real”, corresponding to actual religious doctrines and practices, but none of them has priority over the others, and none of them should claim superiority, let alone exclusivity about the truth regarding matters divine. The Real is thought by Hick on the model of Kant's *things*



*in themselves* or *noumena* (what Kant called “negative noumena”, that is, things so far as they are not objects of our sensible intuition), whereas the person-God of religions (Yahweh, Allah, Krishna, etc.), as well as the *impersonae* of world religions (the Eastern impersonal divine concepts like Nirvana, Brahman, and Tao) are what Kant called *phenomena*.

Although this Kantian approach to the transcendent God, most comprehensively discussed in Hick’s book *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989), is different from what we have been arguing for, nevertheless in a later article Hick (2001) discusses the problem of who are people praying to and who is actually the receiver of their prayers, and comes up with an idea that, in my opinion, is a version of what I have argued for in Chapter 6, section 15, namely, that it is more plausible to think that the actual world contains a number of demigods than to think that it contains the person-God of theism:

“And I would suggest – outrageously, from the point of view of the contemporary secular mindset – that quite possibly the thou of whom we are sometimes aware in prayer is a reality, but is what the eastern religions call a *deva*, a god in distinction from God, or in western terms an angel.”

Of course, Hick does not base his claim on probabilistic considerations like we have done; rather, he sees a conflict between accepting that God is ultimately transcendent and in some way abstract, and what he takes as a fact, namely, that prayers sometimes “work”. How could prayers work if God is The Real, the transcendent, unknowable ultimate, absolute metaphysical reality? Of course, demigods or angels are standard in virtually all monotheistic religions, but Hick’s point seems to be that it is only these entities that one is aware of in one’s prayer, and not some superior person that rules over all these, and this goes against all the monotheistic religions. I am sympathetic to this view, especially because I think it is the

most plausible one, based on probabilistic considerations, on the hypothesis that we have minimal empirical evidence for miracles (see Chapter 6, section 15).

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<sup>i</sup> See, among many others, Kenny 1979, Leslie 1979, John Hick 1989, and O'Connor 2012: ch. 6.

<sup>ii</sup> William Riordan (2008) interprets, following Anna Maria Prastaro 1980, Denys as subscribing to *both* apophatic and cataphatic. It is true that he uses both these methods, but only to claim (in chapter 2 of the *Mystical Theology*) that they are steps toward the more illuminated theology (as opposed to “popular theology”) according to which both affirmation and negation are inadequate when trying to characterize God.

<sup>iii</sup> There are well-known problems with both the notion of a purely transcendent God, as in Neoplatonism, and with that of a purely immanent notion, as in Pantheism; hence the interest in describing God as both transcendent and immanent.

<sup>iv</sup> What Tillich means by “theological theism” is the endeavor to prove the existence of God; so we could say today that it is something close enough to analytic philosophy of religion.