FEMINIST
INTERPRETATIONS
OF
MARY DALY

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The Courage to See and to Sin:  
Mary Daly’s Elemental Transformation of  
Paul Tillich’s Ontology  

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Mary Daly is a student of Paul Tillich in the profound sense that her work has been influenced and informed by his. The growing scope and depth of her thinking is due in no small part to Tillich’s pathbreaking analysis and vision of culture, symbol, existentialism, and ontology. Daly’s use of Tillich as a “springboard” for her postchristian feminist philosophy also entails a profound and invaluable critique of the limitations and distortions embedded in his thinking.

Few students of contemporary theology identify Daly in terms of her reliance upon and contributions to the fields of systematic theology or philosophy. Most often, her name is invoked as the delimitation of “radical” in relation to whatever view is in question, regardless of the applicability of the comparison or appropriateness of the categorization. In what
follows, I shall examine some of the similarities and differences between Tillich’s and Daly’s methods. I shall identify several of Tillich’s central theological concepts that Daly has accepted, developed, and in some cases, moved beyond. Finally, I shall suggest that the radical aspect of Daly’s work lies not in her rejection of the Western epistemological and theological traditions but in her creative and critical use of these traditions to begin building a systematic project.3

For the purpose of this study, I have made use of Tillich’s Systematic Theology and his The Courage to Be not because they are exhaustively representative of his thought, but because they appear to be the writings most closely related to Daly’s work. Mary Daly’s thought develops through the course of her writing, and it is perhaps appropriate from a psychological standpoint to treat all of her books, even though she herself has gently distanced herself from the first, The Church and the Second Sex, claiming it to be the work of a “foresister whose work is an essential source and to whom I am indebted but with whom I largely disagree.”4 I agree with Daly that this first book differs fundamentally in character from her later works, and I will not refer to it here.

Method

Paul Tillich wrote in an era of growing religious skepticism and popular faith in what Daly calls contemporary secular theology.5 In his work he seeks to bring estranged culture back into the “theological circle” by treating the questions he perceives as fundamental to all humans (to whom he refers as men). In Systematic Theology Tillich employs the “method of correlation.” In his words, this method “makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions.”6 In using this method, Tillich hopes to maintain a transcendent integrity in his theological answers yet link them effectively to existential questions.

The existential question that precipitates out of his analysis of the human situation is “man himself.” Being, or rather the “shock of nonbeing,” is what causes “man” to ask the existential question of “himself.”7 The theological answer, in brief, is that Christ is the manifestation of “New Being,” the one who reassures “man” that there is meaning in
existence. Thus (in grossly oversimplified terms) Tillich claims to correlate theological answers with existential questions.

The method of correlation is not so much a means by which Tillich attaches theological answers to questions he deems universal, but a means by which he argues for the complete interdependence of god-answers (being-itself) and human questions (being or nonbeing). Tillich acknowledges that the method of correlation is itself a "theological assertion." 8

Mary Ann Stenger has made a convincing argument that in Beyond God the Father at least, Daly appropriates Tillich's method of correlation and some of his central theological terms. She notes correctly that Daly extracts existential questions of being from the real-life location of women in patriarchal cultures. 9 Daly argues in Beyond God the Father, for example, that the question of transcendence is critical for women seeking ways of overcoming present oppression. In addition, the question of courage in the face of patriarchal alienation and New Being as a goal of feminism constitute ultimate concerns distilled from the experience of patriarchy. 10 It is quite true that Daly's propositions of women "be-coming" are meaningless apart from her in-depth critique of patriarchal influences, institutions, and distortions.

Stenger is critical of Daly's appropriation of the method of correlation, citing her "tendency to absolutize the feminist experience of becoming in her move beyond patriarchal religion." 11 This criticism is one expression of the most common argument against Mary Daly's work. The fear of feminist absolutization represents a concern that feminist claims constitute a new authoritarianism in drag. The concern is in part a good one, in part obfuscating—it is tempting and dangerous to project a simple reversal of power without deep critical analysis of the nature of power in patriarchy. To suggest that Daly does so is to ignore the depth of her analysis. It is worth asking whether feminism in its broadest sense could possibly result in a simple reversal of power when one of its central critiques, shared across (and within) the feminist spectrum of cultures and communities, concerns the nature and articulation of power itself. Feminist scholars, however, spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with this question.

It is true that Daly is not willing to deconstruct her own (and other feminist women's) experiences of marginality far enough to be able to make judgments about shared aspects and differences in feminist experience. Throughout her work, the idea of the experience of oppression as
informative and therefore authoritative in the sense of real needs to be carefully distinguished from the idea of oppression as normative. The former allows the experience of oppression to be taken as valid enough for revolt and for transformation, without turning the experience of oppression into a new domination that erases differences between women. The latter suggests a flat grammar of experience that equates femaleness with oppression, eliminating any philosophical foundations for liberation, and hence any foundations for Daly’s ultimate goals. The idea that oppression is normative is, Daly might argue, a phallacy of the victim, and she is decidedly not interested in victims who valorize (and hence want to remain in) their position. It also erases complex distortions that occur between women by making their experiences all functionally the same, hence privileging those most in the position to name and make their experiences known. Women’s various experiences of oppression as information, on the other hand, provide a foundation for critique and for transformation rooted in an elemental existence that, she believes, is prior to patriarchal distortion. Theoretically, this is an idea that has room for all of the variety of women’s voices, cultures (what Daly calls tribes), and experiences without entirely relinquishing a political and social ontology regarding the status of woman. There is room for infinite variety, except for those (fembots) who flatly deny or wholly collude with the oppressive erasures of patriarchy.

Daly is something of a latter-day Gnostic, insisting not only that feminist vision reveals the ugly fabrications and fallacies (phallacies) of patriarchal domination, but also, and more so, that this knowledge is itself powerful and revolutionary. The special knowledge that women hold is their own experience, authoritative not only in that it need not be authenticated by external, male-dominated norms, but also in that it is cultivated from the peculiarly insightful position of the margin. Like Sandra Harding, Daly believes that standpoint epistemologies, especially from the margin, are more comprehensive and therefore more reliably descriptive. For this reason, they cannot congratulate themselves for perceiving a hidden text when they claim that Daly absolutizes feminist experience, because Daly has already clearly expressed this “preferential option” for them. Daly taps feminist women as the bearers of New Being (Beyond God the Father) and of MetaBe-ing (Pure Lust) because of their boundary perspective. She distances her work from Tillich’s notion of “working on the boundary between philosophy and theology. The work [of Beyond God the Father] is not merely on the boundary between these
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(male-created) disciplines, but on the boundary of both (because it speaks out of the experience of that half of the human species which has been represented in neither discipline).14

Daly does not explicitly claim to be using the method of correlation, and she is suspicious of arguments that are too concerned with issues of method. She warns against “methodolatry,” arguing that “it commonly happens that the choice of a problem is determined by method, instead of method being determined by the problem.”15 Stenger does note that Daly’s work is not without method altogether. She bases her criticism, however, on the assumption that Daly is agreeing to operate with a single method, and that a unitary method is essential to the work of systematic theology or philosophy.

Daly’s work is not without method, but it is easy to overlook the extent to which method discernible in Daly can be characterized as movement.16 In Beyond God the Father, a book in which Daly’s reliance on Tillich is far stronger than in her later works, a method of correlation is arguably present, even though Daly herself prefers to call it a “method of liberation.”17 Gyn/Ecology, Pure Lust and even Outercourse build upon the work of Beyond God the Father and chart distinct courses that seek biophilic new “Metabeing” in the context of (and therefore correlated to) the culture and tradition of patriarchy.

The method discernible in Daly’s work is similar to that found in Tillich’s Systematic Theology. Part of the limitation of Stenger’s criticism of Daly lies in her own apparently uncritical acceptance of Tillich’s absolutized universal “human” existential dilemma over Daly’s explicit discussion of feminist insight.18 Stenger clearly regards Tillich’s discussion of human ultimate concerns as more careful and less essentializing than Daly’s discussion of the ultimate concerns of women who have identified patriarchy as the root oppression in society. But Tillich’s use of the more universal term “human” does not necessarily give more universal meaning to his text. Daly acknowledges that “Tillich’s way of speaking about God as ground and power of being would be very difficult to use for the legitimation of any sort of oppression,”19 but she also argues that “if God-language is even implicitly compatible with oppressiveness, failing to make clear the relation between intellection and liberation, then it will either have to be developed in such a way that it becomes explicitly relevant to the problem of sexism or else dismissed.”20

Both Paul Tillich and Mary Daly find the methods of classical theology insufficient for explaining and dealing with the evils and the possibilities
of contemporary life. Both make use of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and other secular theologies to chart a course toward a better, more whole, and healed existence. Tillich sees an anthropocentric "New Being," Daly a biophilic cosmic one, but both see all of culture as source and resource for revelation. What is revealed turns out to be rather different, depending on whether the presupposition is christocentric or biophilic-feminist. If a method of correlation is common to both thinkers, it is the deductive correlation of the preferred option (Christ, for Tillich; biophilic be-ing, for Daly) with the perceived data and means of culture (post-Enlightenment, existentialist "man" and "his" desires and anxieties for Tillich; patriarchal culture and its boundary representatives—feminist women—for Daly). I suggest that neither truly starts with analysis of culture and ends with theological answers. Both have answers in mind when they ask the questions, both presuppose a path of hope for those who perceive the anxieties/oppressions of contemporary life, namely systematic New Being/elemental Metabe-ing.

Theological Issues: The Power of Being-Itself and of Be-ing

One of the primary theological concepts in both Tillich and Daly is the notion of being. Tillich orients his entire corpus around the claim that "our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being. Only those statements are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of being or not-being for us." Daly fundamentally agrees with Tillich, although her thinking changes across the course of her work. In Beyond God the Father, she sees Tillich's notion of being-itself as essentially static but accepts the ontological category as the best descriptive metaphor for transcendence. Being-itself by itself is detached, abstract, and uncritical of the oppression of patriarchy. Daly's solution in Beyond God the Father is to cast being-itself into motion as a verb, as Be-ing.

Tillich developed the concept of being-itself as metaphor for God partly out of profound respect for the power of symbols. Foreshadowing feminist critiques of patriarchal theology, he wrote that "if a segment of reality is used as a symbol for God, the realm of reality from which it is taken is, so to speak, elevated into the realm of the holy. . . . If God is
called the ‘king,’ something is said not only about God but also about the holy character of Kinghood.”

Despite this similarity, there is a deeper divergence. Tillich stops short of offering a critique of the appropriateness of kinghood as a symbol for God. More important, his critique cannot speak to the ramifications of holy kingship in contemporary society. Daly takes that extra step. The impact of theological systems on the organization of power in society is central to her entire program. If God is called Male, then something is said not only about God but also about the holy privilege of maleness. Daly sees quite clearly that there is more than coincidence in the relation between the maleness of God and the rapacious stature and power of males in history. Tillich opens the door, Daly takes the lead. “It is true that Tillich tries to avoid hypostatization of ‘God’ (though the effort is not completely successful) and that his manner of speaking about the ground and power of being would be difficult to use for the legitimation of any sort of oppression. However, the specific relevance of ‘power of being’ to the fact of sexual oppression is not indicated. Moreover, just as his discussion of God is detached, so is the rest of his theology.”

By casting “transcendent reality” into motion as the verb be-ing, Daly hopes to avoid hypostatization of “God” and affirm the “Verb in which we participate—live, move and have our be-ing.” In Beyond God the Father she refers to God as verb (“the Verb of Verbs”) but by the time of Pure Lust, she does not speak of God at all, but only of Verb. Like Tillich, she recognizes that the logical end of the deconstruction of god-talk is the awareness that, as Tillich puts it, “the truth of a religious symbol has nothing to do with the truth of the empirical assertions involved in it.”

Daly moves into her radical systematic program by warning that “Be-ing, the Verb, cannot without gross falsification be reified into a noun, whether that noun be identified as ‘Supreme Being’ or ‘God,’ or ‘Goddess’ (singular or plural).” Having recognized the vast historical potency of the reified metaphor “God” in both Beyond God the Father and Gym/Ecology, Daly continues sparing use of the term “Goddess” (which she capitalizes in contrast to the patriarchal “god”) in Pure Lust as metaphor for “the Powers of Be-ing, the Active Verb in whose potency all biophilic reality participates.” In acknowledgment of diversity within feminist consciousness and becoming, Daly also alters Tillich’s power of being to the plural Powers of Be-ing.
Non-Being

According to Tillich, Socrates made it clear “that the courage to die is the test of the courage to be.”30 Non-being is the threat before all that has being. Awareness of this threat results in fundamental anxiety against which profound courage, and ultimately the Christ event, is required. Ultimate concern, or anxiety, “expresses the awareness of being finite, of being a mixture of being and non-being, or of being threatened by non-being.”31

Daly fully accepts non-being and the consequent necessity of courage in the face of “the shock of non-being” as appropriate to feminist theological work. The meaning that Daly gives to non-being, however, is quite different and more specific than that given by Tillich. She finds it essential to place non-being squarely within the experience of structural evil and the oppression of women under patriarchy. Non-being as an amorphous existential fear of finitude is a particularly privileged, and one might suggest spoiled, anxiety.

True non-being, Daly suggests, is the alienation and degradation of women inherent in oppressive social, political, and economic structures. The critical existential conflict, she asserts, is not between the self and abstracted nothingness, but “between the self and the structures that have given such crippling security. This requires confronting the shock of non-being with the courage to be.”32

The clear concern with existentialism and security betray Daly’s early uncritical elitism in Beyond God the Father. Critical supporters such as Audre Lorde challenged Daly on her assumptions of essential feminist concerns and her lack of explicit acknowledgments of difference based on race and class experiences.33 Pure Lust attempts a greater inclusivity and demonstrates a heightened awareness of difference. Perhaps in part as a result of her struggle to continue to speak with a feminist (albeit still white feminist) voice while attempting to account for difference in her philosophical conceptualization of biophilic woman, Daly began to suspect that “the questions [of non-being, or finitude] have been framed/confined within parameters that fail to express biophilic intuitions.”34 She cites Tillich’s question “Why is there something, why not nothing?” as a particularly insidious example of patriarchal fascination with death. Equating “phallicism” with necrophilia, she suggests that Tillich’s conflation of two quite different questions is one example of the way that biophilic thinking can be undermined.
A wonderlusty woman might imagine that the question thus posed corresponds to her own ontological experience, to her Lust for Be-ing. She might imagine that the ontological question thus posed expresses an attitude identical to her own Wonder and gratitude that things are. Caught up in this Wonder, she might fail to notice anything suspect about the second half of Tillich’s question: “why not nothing?” Musing women would do well to ask ourselves whether this question would arise spontaneously in biophilic consciousness.35

The question of non-being for Daly develops across her work. She begins by accepting Tillich’s idea that “all human beings are threatened by non-being” but suggests that he misunderstands the location of non-being in human life. She places non-being in a liberationist framework. It refers not to the bored pathos of the privileged male who suddenly realizes that he is not omnipotent, but to the crushed nothingness of women written out of existence altogether. The “shock of non-being” is the woman waking up to the awful reality of her mutilated life.

Women’s non-being in patriarchal culture is so deep and vast that Daly ended up devoting an entire volume to it. The title, introduction, structure, and conclusion of Gyn/Ecology indicate an intention on Daly’s part to write of “exorcism and ecstasy”—a glimpse into a postpatriarchal ethical system. However, the content of women’s non-being overtakes the book. Perhaps because she accepted non-being as an essential category of Be-ing in Beyond God the Father, Daly could not escape the numbing totality of women’s non-being when she moved on to ethics. She attempts to deal with this problem early in Pure Lust by raising the question of the appropriateness of non-being as a necessary opposition to Be-ing. Daly calls her suspicion biophilic intuition and suggests that the profound philosophical depth of the question “Why is there something?” is not appropriately completed by “Why not nothing?” Her revisionist stance thereby transforms into a critique of non-being itself as the necrophilic fascination of patriarchal “sado-spirituality.”

Non-being, in Daly’s feminist theological system, is finally of value only to the extent that it describes the ontological consequences of patriarchal oppression. The courage to be in the face of non-being is “women’s confrontation with the structural evil of patriarchy.”35 Women numbed by patriarchal degradation to the point of acquiescence participate in
non-being. Men and male institutions in patriarchal society, we might go so far as to say, are the bearers of non-being.

Courage

Courage is a crucial concept both to Tillich and to Daly. Tillich begins his book The Courage to Be with the statement that “few concepts are as useful for the analysis of the human situation. Courage is an ethical reality, but it is rooted in the whole breadth of human existence and ultimately in the structure of being itself.” Courage is the human response to the threat of non-being. It is the only positive human response possible. Taking into account the differences in their understandings of non-being, Daly fully agrees. To be in the face of patriarchal annihilation is an act of true courage.

Once again a notion originating with Tillich follows the transforming and deepening course of Daly’s thinking. In Beyond God the Father Daly sees courage perhaps more simplistically than does Tillich. Where Tillich presents courage as an ontological stance, Daly initially sees it more as the bravery of a woman willing to attempt to break out of societal norms, willing to “emerge into a world without models.” Courage,” Tillich argued, “needs the power of being.” In Beyond God the Father Daly implies more simply that the power of being requires courage. She claims that the “courage to be is the key to the revelatory power of the feminist revolution.”

The fact that Daly wrote Gyn/Ecology after Beyond God the Father makes sense in this light. If the Powers of Be-ing require courage because of the death-dealing grip of patriarchy on every woman, then Gyn/Ecology as an exposé on the horrors of patriarchy is an expression of this courage and a necessary step in Daly’s evolution toward her more ontological understanding of courage in Pure Lust.

Tillich sees the courage to be as more than bravery. He argues that the “ethical question of the nature of courage” is one way of asking the ontological question of the nature of being, and involves a profound self-affirmation as well as risk. Daly only fully develops the implications of this insight for feminist systematics in Pure Lust. Having identified non-being as the structural evil of patriarchy, she begins to see the nature of courage in a feminist sense as a profound identification with whatever is “not” in patriarchal society. To do so requires the twin “courage to see” and “courage to sin.”
The courage to see is perceiving and naming what is unseeable in patriarchy: the non-beings, especially the "primordial aliens: women." According to Tillich, courage is revelatory, for it reveals being on the brink of non-being.\textsuperscript{40} But the courage to see is also the courage to see past patriarchy. Daly argues that a "patriarchal theological/philosophical analysis of anxiety has no way to Name the way past these, which is the Elemental Realizing of participation in Metabeing."\textsuperscript{41} Seeing past is also re-membering, and here she begins to develop a more ontological understanding of courage. Pulling past, present, and future out of linearity implies a notion of being that integrates all three.

The courage to sin is the companion to seeing and can be expressed as the constructive side of courage. The courage to see unmasksthe historicity and atrocity of patriarchy and also recalls other possibilities, even if those possibilities survive not as memories but only as questions. The courage to sin is the fundamental self-naming of women, the courage to say no to any and all norms of patriarchy and yes to actions, identities, and attributes deemed sinful in patriarchal culture. Describing her own process of discovery, Daly writes that she "came to See more of the previously hidden connections among Courageous Acts themselves." What she calls the Courage to Sin became, for Daly, the core insight and feminist ethical challenge, rooted in a Tillichian courage to be because, for women, to be in any real sense is to sin under patriarchal norms. "I am not alluding here to the petty sort of sinning which is forbidden and therefore deceptively incited by the 'major religions' of phallocracy. I am talking about Sinning Big. For a woman on this patriarchally controlled planet, to be is to Sin, and to Sin is to be. To Sin Big is to be the verb which is her Self-centering Self."\textsuperscript{42} The courage to see, therefore, presages and illuminates the consequent sin of self-affirming existence.

Daly leads the way through a dance of etymology, retrieving the power of language used for millennia to control women. For readers new to Daly, her use of archaic words such as witch, hag, crone, spinster, and the like are jolting, especially when it becomes clear that the origins of these commonly derisive labels lie in a pre-Christian Anglo-European culture and refer to long suppressed strengths in women. The idea and promise of latent power residing in any term formerly used to beat down women is enormously gratifying. White Anglo-American feminists are discovering a desperate paucity of words with which to build themselves up, more so even than the women of African American or other ethnic desents. As Alice Walker has pointed out, for a young black girl to be chastised for "acting womanish," she is being put down with a term that equates
femaleness with audacity, independence, responsibility, outrageousness.\textsuperscript{43} For a white girl to receive chastisement for the same crime, she would have to be called “mannish” (as indeed some are).

With her concept of the courage to see and to sin Daly conditionally accepts Tillich’s argument that “the courage of confidence says ‘in spite of’ even to death.”\textsuperscript{44} Death, however, is the crucial word. Tillich is content to keep death isolated from the structural evil of which he is a privileged part. Daly concretizes this idea of death not as the natural end process of life in balance, but as the necrophilic fascination of patriarchy in all of its manifestations. For a woman to risk her life to say no to death is courageous in the deepest sense. “The Courage to Sin, to be Elemental through and beyond the horrors of The Obscene Society, is precisely about being true and real ontologically, and about refusing to be a player of the [patriarchal] female part.”\textsuperscript{45}

The Culture of New Being: From Transcendent to Elemental

New Being is Tillich’s metaphoric, optimistic answer to non-being: “a reality of reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning and hope.”\textsuperscript{46} For Tillich, Jesus Christ is the bearer of New Being for humankind. He is both the ultimate and the final location of New Being because “if there were no personal life in which existential estrangement had been overcome, the New Being would have remained a question and an expectation and would not be a reality. . . . only if the existence is conquered in one point—a personal life, representing existence as a whole—is it conquered in principle.”\textsuperscript{47} Although Daly does not refer to this text in her writing, her critique of New Being relates to the assumptions apparent here. Tillich’s acceptance of “personal life” as the location for New Being hints at Daly’s notion of women’s experience, but his limitation to “one point” is puzzling. Tillich assumes that principles require crystallized, abstracted, representational examples in order to maintain their claims to truth. Were more than one personal life to manifest New Being, difference might sully the principle, or negate it altogether.

It is not surprising that Daly fully rejects Jesus Christ as the manifestation of hope to those literally wiped out by patriarchal evil. In Beyond God the Father she argues a range of points against “christolatry” that are
now familiar to feminists but that in 1973 were revelatory. Beyond the metaphorical power of Jesus’ maleness in the hands of ecclesial authorities, she points to the convenient interchangeability of historicity and ahistoricity in the uses of Jesus’ maleness to oppress women (“Jesus was a man, therefore women cannot be ecclesial or spiritual leaders” and “the maleness of Jesus is unimportant; women cannot identify oppression in him”). In addition, Daly identifies the “scapegoat syndrome,” the sacrificial “female” posture of Jesus, the power of naming Christ as He, and finally the silencing “compensatory glory” of Mary. All of these issues and many more have since been examined more deeply, particularly by white feminist theologians benefiting from Daly’s early work. Daly predicted in *Beyond God the Father* that the “problem” of christology would only grow as “woman-consciousness” grows. Some contemporary white feminist theologians who are attempting to work with christology are admitting to uncertainty that anything can be left after the “paring down of phallacies.”

In addition to the maleness of Jesus, the transcendent singularity of Jesus as the “final revelation” severs the organic process of revelation required by the concept of being-itself as Verb, making Tillich’s exclusivist christology further incompatible with Daly’s transformation of a christocentric New Being into biophilic Metabeing. If language about transcendence is language about the verb be-ing, and if the threat of non-being is the threat posed to all life by the necrophilia of patriarchy, then New Being must define an ongoing process of liberation from patriarchy/non-being.

Nevertheless, Tillich argues that New Being is an “involved” experience, and once again, Daly takes him seriously. Just as Tillich upends the transcendent notion of God as above and locates it in the underlying “ground,” so Daly has taken the ahistorical particularity of Christ as New Being and concretized it in the experience of feminist women. As Stenger points out, “instead of Tillich’s norm of ultimate meaning and reality being manifest in Jesus as the Christ, Daly sees ultimate meaning and reality manifest in the feminist experience of becoming.” It is a mistake to read “feminist becoming” as a purely anthropocentric vision. Daly “grounds” the notion of being far more completely than Tillich, and transforms the transcendent into an “elemental” understanding of the biosphere as a whole.

As a result of biophilia, the concept of New Being becomes too confined in linearity and anthropocentrism and so Daly replaces it in *Pure*
Lust with Metabeing. Metabeing is an involvement in the forces of life rather than the death-oriented severance of old from new in New Being. “The word Metabeing is used . . . to Name Realms of active participation in the Powers of Be-ing.”52 In fact, Daly’s definitions of Metabeing provide the basic structure of her systematic (or Elemental) philosophy. The structure of Pure Lust is significant not only in terms of the flow of her arguments but also as illustration of the nature of her philosophical/theological project. It would be (and often is) too easy to classify Daly’s work as mere commentary on Tillich or as a radical critique of patriarchy. It is also too simple to classify it as utopian in a futuristic, unrealistic sense. Metabeing, as one of the maturing concepts in Daly’s thought, is itself a notion developed through stages, from Tillich’s being, to be-ing, to new Being, to Metabeing.

The maturation of Daly’s thought is evident not only in terms of the mobility of her concept of being but also of its multivalent historicity. She transforms the stasis of being into the motion of be-ing as verb, implying an evolutionary understanding of the nature of the immanent and the transcendent. But she develops this evolutionary understanding still further in her shift from New Being to Metabeing. Evolution as a linear history is insufficient for Metabeing. While Tillich strove to endow his concept of New Being with involvement in the nonstatic present, its dependence on the “one point of Jesus” as New Being valorizes the new and points a penile trajectory out over the actual and into the nonpresent transcendence of the future.

Daly structures Pure Lust around the four meanings of the prefix meta in Metabeing. A closer look at these four meanings reveals that her notion of “realms,” of “foreground” and “background” are not aspects of some weird taxonomy but an integrational conception of nonlinear historicity. The first definition of meta, to “occur later” indicates the “knowledge of participation in Elemental Powers of Be-ing [occurring] after a woman has understood that the blockage of her powers within phallocracy . . . is insufferable.”53 A promise of power results from the courage to “see” phallocracy and to “see” women without hatred for perhaps the first time. Second, meta as “situated behind” re-covers the ancient past of probable female power (traced through despised but not-lost female terminology) and makes that past present through “lusty” linguistics and stories, a task she begins in her ambitious linguistic project Webster’s First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language.

Third, meta as “change in, transformation of” makes Metabeing a re-
weaving process that pulls together women’s “frozen bits of being.” The marginal though persistent resilience of witchcraft, of resistance, of Lesbianism, of biophilia, of traditions of independence and audacity still evident everywhere in unexpected places, and particularly in nonwhite women’s cultures, are the “tiny bits of being” waiting like seeds for fertile ground.

Finally, meta as “beyond, transcending” gives to Metabeing its inclusive “times/spaces of continuing transcending of earlier stages of shedding the shackles of body/mind that fix women as targets of phallic lust.” Transcendence here is a mobile reality giving to courage the ability to see and sin. It is not a reality that can in any way be unlinked from immanence. Immanence for Daly is elemental: the spoken word, the entities of fire, air, earth, and water, the cosmos and intelligence. Transcendence cannot transcend these—that is necrophilia, the switch to the question “Why not nothing?”

Metabeing forms the basic ontological structure of Daly’s system. Being as a verb entails motion, either linear or organic, and Metabeing encompasses motion and presence. None of these meanings of Metabeing can therefore be called prior to any other. Daly speaks of a spiral as the visual metaphor for her work and claims that there is no starting point. Tillich glimpsed this possibility when he argued that his system presupposes both Christ and being, but he did not possess the courage to develop interdependence in the immanental way that Daly has done. He ends up with a fundamentally irreconcilable discontinuity between his single-point answer of Christ and his multiplex suggestion of being. Daly has made multivalence her method, with motion and multiplicity her outcome, resulting in both greater elemental comprehensibility and greater philosophical consistency.

Conclusions

Like Tillich, Mary Daly has embarked on a monumental project. She is attempting to explain the possibilities for “being” human in a way that correlates critical questions of experience and being with theological answers. What begins as a more or less simple feminist critique of Tillich’s more promising notions (being, non-being, courage, New Being, and others) develops into a far-reaching attempt to construct a philosophy and
theology that is consistent in its methods as well as its message. *Beyond God the Father* and *Gyn/Ecology* form a prolegomenon to *Pure Lust*, providing the foundation for her creative systematics of Metabeing.

I suggest that it is a mistake to speak of Daly as a utopian or to dismiss her corpus as hopelessly essentialist. Although visionary and even at times dogmatically resistant to accommodation, her work is not primarily future oriented, nor does it project a dislocated society of cloned feminists. Not all utopias are futuristic, but they tend to be "impossibly ideal schemes" especially when viewed from under the canopy of phallocratic patriarchy. Instead, Daly offers a descriptive analysis of Tillich's more limited notion of New Being that is fully accountable to the daily conditions of grinding patriarchy with a deliberately optimistic, if uncompromising, view beyond. Her point, really, could hardly be more pragmatic. Utopia in its fantastical sense, I suspect, is finally as unacceptable as New Being in that it implies a discontinuity with the present that is once again necrophilia under wraps.

Daly herself as a philosophical separatist does not make separatism monolithic, reactionary, or normative, except when it implies removal from the most damaging centers and sources of phallocratic culture (to which she might now add Jesuit colleges!). She assumes a critical nature to femaleness and to patriarchy, but sees difference as fully compatible with (even, dare we say, essential to) these natures. Her work should not be placed in complete opposition to the critical skepticism of postmodernism except insofar as she absolutizes and hypostatizes the evils of patriarchal domination. Although she is fond of sweeping proclamations, such as "patriarchy itself is the prevailing religion of the entire planet," it is not possible to say that Daly finally essentializes women into a single nature or cultural construction and thereby erases difference. She is pragmatic in that she takes the category of "woman" as a given, bearing in itself both possibility and limitation as historically and culturally constructed, but is open to the fluidity of the category to individual, cultural, and even biological diversity. But Daly is impatient with words that do not lead to liberative action. "I want to blast out of bore-dom, every way, every day. 'That's so extreme,' they say. 'It's High Time to be Extreme,' I say. While we wade knee deep in the blood of women shall I chat about Freud, Derrida, and Foucault? No, I don't think so."

Nevertheless, Daly is in love with words and with the power of naming, and wants to claim that power while guarding against the colonization that the act of naming historically bears. Again drawing on Tillich, she
argues that symbolization is essential to the work of liberation in that symbols "open up levels of reality otherwise closed to us and they unlock dimensions and elements of our souls which correspond to these hidden dimensions and elements of reality" (PL, 25). In this she does not forego the possibility of an ontological or essential core that "responds" and she does not take up the postmodern question of the status of being altogether. But it is inaccurate and simplistic to suggest that Daly, in all of her work to unmoor Being-itself from hypostatization, turns and hypostatizes the essence of women in a single cultural construct. There is "no way" she argues, "that Elemental feminist philosophy can speak adequately to the realms of Wild be-ing without symbols. . . . Of course, there can be no One Absolutely Right symbol for all Lust women, for we belong to different tribes and have great individual diversity. Despite this fact, and also because of it Prudes 9 prudently heed our intuitions about which symbols ring true, listening to the sounds of their names and to the rhythms of the contexts in which this Naming occurs" (PL, 25). To the extent that they are alive, women and men bear life, and therefore possess the potential for biophilic and elemental be-ing. If there is essentialism in Daly, this is it. She fully demands and depends upon the critical idea of profound social construction and uses the metaphor of a mirror for the deconstruction of identity necessary for everyone caught in patriarchy.

Having learned only to mirror, they would find in themselves reflections of the sickness in their masters. They would find themselves doing the same things, fighting the same way. Looking inside for something there, they would be confused by what at first would appear to be an endless Hall of Mirrors. What to copy? What model to imitate? Where to look? What is a mere mirror to do? But wait—how could a mere mirror even frame such a question? The question itself is the beginning of an answer that keeps unfolding itself. The question-answer is a verb, and when one begins to move in the current of the verb, of the Verb, she knows that she is not a mirror.60

Daly affirms that there is something beyond the mirrors. But she does not presume to define what that something is, nor does she suggest that something involves unchanging sameness. Carol Christ supports Daly, arguing that "ambiguity is necessary to feminism. We acknowledge the
perspectival nature of all truth claims, but we are not thoroughgoing relativists [which is] ... essential to post-modernism.\footnote{61}

If Mary Daly cannot be neatly categorized as an essentialist utopian, the seriousness of her work in continuity with the patriarchal tradition of Western theology and philosophy becomes more significant. It is even possible to argue that she more than acknowledges the patriarchal epistemological tradition by engaging it as she does, both as source of argument and as springboard for her own elemental system. I suggest that the truly radical aspect of her work is not its extrapatriarchal, alien nature, but rather its metapatriarchal, engaged nature. Indeed, for beneficiaries of the “sado-state” and “sado-spirituality,” to confront Daly as a true daughter of the tradition may mean to accept a threat to patriarchy that is much closer to home, and ultimately more damning.

Notes

2. I have most often witnessed this uncritical categorization of Daly’s work in classrooms and in personal discussions, unfortunately from feminist professors as well as students.
3. I use the term “systematic” to describe Daly’s project. She does not use this term herself, probably because it carries too much of a patriarchal burden. Part of my contention, however, is that her work is systematic-realistic and not merely utopian, so I employ the term with that conclusion in mind.
4. Mary Daly, \textit{Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), xiii. Hereafter referred to as \textit{BGF}.
5. See primarily Mary Daly, \textit{Gyn/Ecology} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) for references to contemporary psychiatry and science practitioners as secular theologians (e.g., 93).
10. Stenger, 246.
11. Stenger, 250.
13. I use the liberationist phrase “preferential option” not because Daly uses it but because it is an appropriate loan/overlap from the liberation theology lexicon.
15. Daly, \textit{BGF}, 11.
16. In Pure Lust, Daly explicitly describes her method as “movement,” presumably as her attempt to maximize the room in her work for “metamutuation” and the ongoing influences of new insights.

17. Daly, BGF, 8.

18. It is important to note that Daly does not attempt to speak for all women, nor to ascribe to all women a feminist consciousness of patriarchal oppression. She does, however, imply that there is an essential truth in the oppressive experience of women, however it is discovered or named, and in whatever terms it is analyzed. There is a kind of Gnostic essentialism concerning oppression in Daly’s presuppositions, but feminist critics must be careful to identify it as such and not as an absolving of women per se. See PL, 27 and 344.


20. Daly, BGF, 21.


22. Beginning in BGF, Daly is wary of the name God. She uses it only sparingly (and harshly) in Gym/Ecology and abandons it altogether in Pure Lust (where only references under “god” are listed.) This movement reflects her own prediction in BGF that “it is probable that the movement will eventually generate a new language of transcendence. There is no reason to assume that the term ‘God’ will always be necessary, as if the three-letter word, materially speaking, could capture and encapsulate transcendent being” (BGF, 21–22).


24. Daly, BGF, 19.

25. Daly, BGF, 19.

26. Daly, BGF, 34.

27. See Daly’s own description of her movement away from “God” in Pure Lust, 423 n. 24.


29. Daly, PL, 26.


32. Daly, BGF, 24; emphasis mine.


34. Daly, PL, 29.

35. Daly, PL, 29.

36. Daly, BGF, 23.

37. Tillich, CTB, 1.

38. Daly, BGF, 24.

39. Tillich, CTB, 155.


42. Mary Daly, Outercourse: The Be-Dazzeling Voyage (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 198.


44. Tillich, CTB, 168.

45. Daly, PL, 152.

46. Tillich, ST, 1:49.

47. Tillich, ST, 2:98.

48. Carter Heyward is one such theologian attempting to deal with christology, but who admits to the difficulty (personal conversation, Cambridge Mass., May 1990). See Carter Heyward, Speaking

49. See Tillich’s discussion of the history of revelation (ST, 1:137–39) in which he attempts to incorporate both the multiple revelations of “humanistic theology” and the claim of ultimacy of “neo-orthodox and allied liberal theology” by speaking not of a sole revelation in Christ but a “final” one.

51. Stenger, 250.
52. Daly, PL, 26.
53. Daly, PL, 27.
54. Daly, PL, 27.
55. Daly, PL, 7–11.
57. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 39.
58. Daly, Outercourse, 340.
59. “Prude, n [derived fr. F: prudefemme wise or good woman, fr. OF: prode good, capable, brave + femme woman—Webster’s]: Good, capable, brave woman endowed with Practical/Passionate Wisdom; one who has acquired the E-motional habit of Wild Wisdom, enabling her to perform Acts which, by the standards of phallicism, are Extreme; Lusty Woman who insists upon the Integrity, Self-esteem, and Pride of her sex; Shrewd woman who sees through the patriarchal norms of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ constantly Re-membering the Good. . . . N.B.: Prudes note with Pride that the word proud is etymologically akin to pride. Both are derived from the OF prode” (Daly, Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language. Conjured by Mary Daly in Cahoots with Jane Caputi [Boston: Beacon Press, 1987], 157).
60. Daly, BGF, 197.

References


