

Concerning the Senses of "Symbol"

I use "symbol" in three distinct, albeit closely related, senses:

(1) in connection with our distinctively human capacity to grasp and objectify meaning. In this first, broad sense (*sensu lato*), "symbol" is properly applied to any and all objectified meaning, whether the mode or medium of its objectification be speech, conduct, or artifacts, including "sociofacts";

(2) in connection with the objectification of specifically religious (or philosophical) meaning, which is, perforce, analogical in a broad sense insofar as concepts and terms proper to thinking and speaking about the nondivine are applied to the divine. In this second, strict sense (*sensu stricto*), "symbol" is equivalent in meaning with "analogy," broadly understood; and

(3) in connection with a particular kind of objectification of religious (or philosophical) meaning—namely, myth—if and when it is understood to be precisely that. In this third, strictest sense (*sensu strictissimo*), "symbol" applies to any myth insofar as it is used and understood as myth. (This, by the way, is also pretty much Bultmann's use of the term; and Hartshorne uses it in somewhat the same way in distinction from "analogy" in his strict sense of the word.)

In my view, myth is a species of "analogy," understood broadly, and hence also of "symbol," used in what I distinguish as the second, strict sense of the term. Myth is not the *only* species of analogy in the broad sense or of symbol in the strict sense, since there can be analogies or symbols in these senses whose concepts and terms are derived, not empirically, from our external sense perception, but existentially, from our internal nonsensuous perception of our own existence as related to others and totality. But where the concepts and terms used in an analogy are not existential but empirical, it is an instance of the properly mythical species of analogy, as well as of symbol in the second sense of the term. Hence I would not disagree with the statement that some of the things I say about myth would apply also to "symbol" in that second sense; for in that sense, "symbol" is to "myth" as genus is to species. But if all myth is symbol in this second, strict sense of "symbol," not all symbol in this sense is myth. My objection to the way Tillich and others talk globally simply of "religious symbol"

without making any such distinction is that it does not clarify but only confuses relevant issues.

It will be noted that I have implied a further distinction between a broad and a strict sense of "analogy," as when I said that "symbol" *sensu stricto* "is equivalent in meaning with 'analogy,' broadly understood." In its strict sense, "analogy" designates what is really only a particular kind of analogy *sensu lato*—namely, a *non-symbolic* (in the third, strictest sense of "symbolic") analogy. Whereas "symbol" in the third sense designates religious (or philosophical) thought and speech whose concepts and terms are properly *empirical*, "analogy" in the strict sense of the term designates discourse whose concepts and terms are properly *existential*.

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N.B.: This clarification of the three sense of "symbol" would appear to be the original of such three-point clarifications.

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