

Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich

A digital edition of Paul Tillich's Lecture "Religion and Culture"
Harvard University, 1955-56

Transcribed by JJ Warren and Michaela Durst

2025

(version: December 19, 2025)

[111]

Lecture XII[a], Nov. 8, 1955

Discussion with students: *Question:* Please comment on the architecture of Memorial Hall. *Answer (Paul Tillich):* No comment! [Smiling – pause – sotto voce]: The worst would be too good! *Lecture:* We have started the discussion on religion and that part of culture which we call science. Last time I gave you a description of the situation of the man in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the earth was out of its central position, and the consequences for this, for man's feeling of security and for the whole mythological framework within which the man of the Middle Ages moved, in a kind of divine-demonic safety. This shows the reason why a conflict arose between modern science, represented by Copernicus and Galileo, and the religious groups which felt responsible for the continuation of this system of safety, as it had developed during the Middle Ages. It was not the scientific method as such, but it was that element in the new sciences which concerned man's existence itself: the hidden religious element which brought about the conflict.

And this is always the case. My thesis of course is that since religion is ultimate concern, and ultimate concern represents a special *dimension* of reality, there can be no real conflict on the level of scientific statements as such. But there are very few scientific statements *as such* – they are usually embedded into a matrix of philosophical and religious presuppositions, and the conflict usually arises in the realm of this matrix, in the realm of these presuppositions. My first example was the tremendous shaking of the foundations of the medieval man, when modern astronomy decentralized the earth and made it a small piece in an infinite universe. [112]

I come to a second example for the same fundamental thesis, namely the excitement produced by Darwinism in the 19th, and in this context also in the beginning of the 20th, century. What was the reason for this excitement? It has two reasons. The one reason was that the developmental interpretation of reality and its mechanistic form seemed to contradict the symbol of creation. Creation, in traditional thinking, was understood as a divine act "in the beginning," and even if the biblical story was not taken literalistically [sic.] – as it, however, very often *was* taken – but even then it was considered as an expression of a divine act with which the world process has started, and in which the divine forms of life have been produced so that they could develop independently and in mutual interdependence on earth. But the idea of a development of one of them, or all

of them, out of the other ones was something which seemingly contradicted this myth of creation.

Now what do we say to this first part of the problem of Darwinism? We must say that this is an idea of creation which, even if the story of Genesis is not taken literally, is literalistic. It takes creation as an event either in time and space – which usually is the imaginary form in which it is taken – or in such a way that it happened once upon a time, and when it happened, time itself started. Now this doctrine of creation is in no way the necessary consequence of the fundamental idea of creation, which is so fundamental for Christianity that it took at least 100 years of a life-and-death struggle, for the early Church, to resist any attempt to dissolve Christianity from the Old Testament and the presupposition of all Old Testament piety, namely the idea of creation. For the idea of creation [means that the world-as-it-is is good, and that there is no demonic power [113] beside the one all-embracing and all-producing Power, which is called Yahweh, the God of Israel, in the Old Testament; and that this idea has consequences today in every philosophical discussion. This weekend I was in Washington and had to give several lectures, two of them under the title “Psychoanalysis and Religion” and “Existentialism and Psychoanalysis.” These two lectures *continuously* came to a point which later on came out very clearly in the discussion, that the fundamental decision about existentialism is a decision about the Christian doctrine of creation, whether the world is distorted in its not only existential nature (which *also* is the Christian doctrine), but [also] that it is distorted in its *very* nature, or in its essential nature also – which then is nothing else than its existential nature.

Now this was the real point of discussion: Is the world, in its essential structure, evil? Or is the world, in its essential structure, good? Is Augustine right when he says “Being as being is good” (*Esse qua esse bonum est*), or is Sartre the existentialist right when he says that “man’s essence is his existence,” there *is* nothing except his existence; and what he calls his essence is only a reflection of his existence? – This was the point of discussion. And this is the point in which the problem of creation becomes actual for every present-day philosophical discussion insofar as it transcends the realm of mere logic. I am very glad for this experience I had this weekend, that this came out so clearly in the preparation of these lectures and later in the reaction to them.

Now this dogma – if you call it a dogma – or this fundamental attitude towards reality [(as I would call it) – if this is attacked, then indeed a fundamental [affirmation] [114] of Christianity, including its whole interpretation of history, is undercut. And the way in which even those in this country who are not consciously Christian, or do not stand consciously in the Jewish-Christian tradition, even *they* would not be able, if they were consistent, to act as they do, as if it is possible to transform reality towards the better.

Now this was *behind* this fight. But the concrete form in which the fight with Darwinism was going on was the question whether the divine creativity is eliminated in the moment in which the theory of evolution prevails. Here, theology made the tremendous mistake of restricting the meaning of creation to the beginning, in terms of a special divine act in which all different forms have been produced, and after this the world goes on on the basis of this basic creation. But this is not implied in the Christian doctrine of creation at all – on the contrary: classical theology, in people like Augustine, Luther and Calvin, has strongly emphasized that the divine creation cannot be separated from His acts of preservation, that God acts creatively here and now and in every moment, and that the way in which higher forms of life are produced is a matter of scientific hypothesis and does not at all change the dimension of divine creativity, whether the answer is:

mechanistically, or organically, or idealistically – or however you want it.

Now here you again see one thing: such struggles must be deeply analyzed with respect to their theological-philosophical matrix on the one hand, and their scientific-methodological procedures on the other. In the moment in which theology interferes with the [methodological procedures, it becomes demonic, it destroys the autonomous service to truth, it destroys the honest mind of scientific research. [115]

In the moment in which *science* derives (which is its justified right and its necessary service) – but in the moment in which it derives from this a criticism of the theological matrix, not realizing that *its own* matrix is *also* theological, then science becomes destructive. And this is what we have to do whenever, in the future, new discussions between religion and science may arise.

But Darwinism was not only in conflict with Christianity because of the confusion of these two levels – the dimension of ultimate concern and the dimension of scientific research – it was in conflict with Christianity because of the doctrine of man. The decisive moment in which divine creativity was important, for theological thinking, was the moment in which man-as-man was created. Now in the evolutionary theory there is a slow transition from animal forms to man as we know him, in the period which we call world-history. It is a very small period, in terms of the development of the universe. But it is characteristic that in the myth of most nations, and certainly also of Judaism and Christianity, this very small period was considered to be the *only* period in which there *was* a creation. And therefore the Orthodox Jews, even today, calculate the duration of the world in something like five thousand years. Others give a little more margin for God's creativity and for world-history, but in any case, the fact that they *consider* that the only really important thing in the universe is the history of man, of which [history] Christ is the center, *induced* them, [and induced the unconscious mythological thinking, to identify the development of the universe with the comparatively known world-history. Now that of course is again something where one must say: this is a matrix of scientific thought which is based on a tremendous confusion. As long as there was no problem – because science didn't know about the billions of years necessary to produce a stone – at that time this was alright. Mythology and science were not yet separated. In the moment in which science realizes how many thousands, hundred-thousands, and even millions of years are needed to produce the slightest thing that exists on earth today, it was a tremendous mistake of Christianity to resist this enlargement of our knowledge about the universe. But I was almost incredulous, I couldn't believe it, when I was told that there are large groups still in this country, the so-called "Bible Belt," where Fundamentalism still resists the scientific hypothesis about the development of the universe in the name of the register given in the Book of Genesis, about the descendants of Adam up to Abraham and Moses. Now if this is done, then we have a conflict which is *not* a conflict of religion and science, but which is a conflict of people who are not able to see the difference of the dimensions. [116]

The last point of resistance is that even if everything is left to development, in the sense of modern science, one thing cannot be left, namely the rise of man, because in man something absolutely new arises, and this absolutely-new demands a new act of creation, i.e. an interference of God in the world-historical process in order to produce a being which has an immortal soul. Now I told you, long ago, that the fact that man has language, indeed distinguishes him from every [other being, and that some adherents of Darwinism are in great distress about the fact that they cannot make the young chimpanzees, even after many more months than a human being needs, in order to learn his first words. So there is indeed a jump, a qualitative difference, between man as we [117]

know him today, and any other living being on earth. To explain this, theologians have emphasized a special interfering act of creation by a highest divine Being.

Now I would say, here again, the situation is one of confusion and even of demonic interference from both sides. The way in which the historical man whom we know – who has language, communicative language – has arisen, does not make any difference for the quality of his being. The development towards man is – as [is] every development – slow, and goes in many slow transitory steps. On the other hand, there is suddenly a speed in the development of nature, something new appears, something which is qualitatively different from all other beings which existed before. This is so in the gene development of life on earth, and it is so in those mutations which finally produce this being which we call our self, historical man, man who has history, who has language, who has universals, who has freedom, who has responsibility, who has guilt, who knows about the temporal as well as about the eternal. We are not able to say in scientific terms when this man appears. We don't know how much we must attribute to slow steps of transition, and how much to speeded-up jumps of new appearances. This doesn't matter. On the contrary: man is not separated from nature. Man's state can be seen in creation, fall, and salvation – the three central symbols of every religion – *only* in unity with the universe as a whole. [118] You cannot isolate immortal souls from all other beings. One had to ask: when do they appear in a child? And you can give no answer in this case, as you can give no answer in the case of the world-development. *Sometimes, there it is.* There is a being with whom we can speak, whom we can consider as a “thou,” making us into a self, into an ego, and vice versa. But we can never say, with a child, when this can happen.

Therefore the idea of the immortal soul as a special entity is nothing which belongs to religion qua religion. What *belongs* to religion qua religion is that we, in our actual experience, as historical man, are able to experience responsibility, guilt, healing, eternity. And we cannot go beyond this. We only can look at the biblical symbolism which is much wiser than these pseudo-Platonic adherents of a separated soul, namely that man is fallen and estranged and will be reconciled and fulfilled with the *whole* of nature, with nature as a whole. Or in another terminology: that, as nature reaches into man, man reaches into nature, and vice versa, and that there is no point in which you are able, scientifically, to make a cut; and that, religiously, this is no ultimate question, but that the dimension of religion does not demand *anything* as the fact that beings are able to *have* ultimate concern.

Now this was the conflict between Darwinism and Christianity. And I repeat that if the terms “creation” and “evolution” ever come into conflict, you can diagnose that there is confusion or misunderstanding about the meaning of *both* of them, that people are not able [to distinguish the scientific probabilities which are confirmed or refuted by [119] continuously-going-on [sic.] experimentation – on the one side, where nobody or nothing is allowed to interfere, neither a totalitarian state nor authoritarian religion; and that, on the other hand, there is the dimension of ultimate concern, its experiences and its symbols. These experiences cannot be denied *either*, and if they are, then you must show to the people who do so that they don't deny them in the name of their scientific method but in the name of their theological or metaphysical presuppositions of which they are not aware.

Now this leads me to another conflict which is going on during these two conflicts – Galileo and the Church, Darwin and the Church – and it is going on all the time between them and all the time today, namely: the conflict between a mechanistic interpretation of reality and the experience of freedom which every human being has, including those

who preach mechanism – and preaching is an expression of their freedom!

The best pattern for this has been brought about by the French astronomer Lamarck, who said that if in a given moment all facts of this given moment are given to him, he can calculate everything which will happen, in Heaven and on earth, ever since. Now this means Lamarck puts himself in the position of a divine outside observer and then describes the process of the world as mechanically calculable processes. Now the first answer to this is that Lamarck forgets that every observer belongs to the processes which he observed himself. In order to make such statements, the observer must forget himself as an element of that which he observes. Modern science does not [make this mistake] [120] any more. Modern science is very much aware of the function of the observer, and all the critics of mechanism, for centuries, were aware of the fact that the observer – namely man who *makes* such statements – belongs to the whole of reality about which he makes these statements. Therefore the critics of the universal mechanistic worldview are aware of the fact that this mechanism, if it is carried through, must explain something which itself cannot be explained mechanistically, namely the fact that there is a mind which is able to discuss mechanism as truer than other alternatives. And a discussion between true and false is a discussion in the realm of freedom, because if it were a mechanical process which produces mechanism, it would have no truth value, it would be only another fact in the universal mechanism. In this way, the whole theory undercuts itself by the very fact that it does exist.

Now this means: our immediate experience contradicts this worldview which applies special experiences of an abstract character in physical sciences to the whole of reality. A mechanistic worldview does exactly what a progressivistic [sic.] worldview does on another level. I told you that the progressivistic [sic.] worldview elevates the limited experience of progress, in every human action – where it is justified and necessary, otherwise we would not act at all – to a universal law of metaphysics, or of the divine universe, however you want to express it. In the same way, mechanistic science elevates the limited realm in which calculable, quantitative relationships can be described, into a universal law for everything that is. In doing so, it becomes metaphysical or religious itself. And only in this realm is the conflict going on, not in the realm of the application of quantitative [calculations to everything living, and to a certain extent (I come more to this later)] [121] even to the psychology of man. There is a level in which mechanical calculation is justified. But what is not justified is the universalization of this mechanical experimentation, which is very important for a limited level.

Now everything is all right and theologians rejoice. They rejoice especially if Mr. Heisenberg tells them that there is in physics a principle of indeterminacy, and if even the great Planck writes a little book on human freedom. “Now science has justified us,” many theologians say – you can read that in a lot of books – “and we don’t have to fear any more these bad people from Lamarck to Darwin to these present day materialists.”

The situation is not as nice as this, thank Heaven!, because if it were as nice as this, then the *next* great scientist, *after* Planck and Heisenberg, would perhaps discover what Einstein – and I had a day’s talk with him in the year 1932 – once told me, that he knows that we are now under the theories of Planck and [the] principle of indeterminacy to have a universally valid and calculable universe; but he added – and he insisted on this – that it is his belief that once upon a time science will rediscover that worldview which he, Einstein, brought with him out of the 19th century. Now this prophecy has not been fulfilled, up to today, but it *might* be fulfilled one day – then all the poor theologians who rejoiced about the rediscovery of freedom!

Now I am very much afraid that the favorable climate in natural science, which we certainly have today, can be used in order to derive *too quickly*, from science, a theological statement! You cannot derive a statement in the dimension of ultimate concern from a statement [in the realm of finite interrelationships with which science deals. If you try to do it, you are open to every catastrophe of such derivations which, with great probability, will follow once upon a time, earlier or later. [122]

Therefore we must *not* be afraid if science *goes beyond* the principle of indeterminacy, and we must not rejoice if science *discovers* the principle of indeterminacy. And I will give an almost scientific, or perhaps *really* scientific, argument against the rejoicing: all this is going on in subatomic, microcosmic inquiries. *Every* scientist will tell you that the infinite probability for the macrocosmic consideration is that in spite of the incalculability of the movement of the ions and electrons, in the large consideration things will be quite much the same as they were before: when you turn your key, your car will run. And this simply means: in the macrocosmic consideration, the indeterminacy principle has little or no application. But this itself is a scientific argument, and there may be a counter-argument, and I will not go into this from a theological point of view. I use it only in order to warn theologians about rejoicing if something might have happened in physics which allays some of our fears – the fears must be overcome in the *other* dimension, but not in the dimension of science.

Another consideration, to which we must look, are the astronomical calculations of today and the principle of entropy, which as you know means that the water runs down the river and not up again, i.e., warmth, if it has been used, cannot be used any more but dissipates, so that there is a continuous waste of power which cannot be replaced in terms of physical necessity. Now this [Second Law of Thermodynamics plays a tremendous role in the apologetic discussion and, today, plays an even greater role than in the last 30 years. I will tell you: even the Roman Church enjoyed and rejoiced that this principle was re-emphasized – although it was discovered about 100 years ago – because that means that the Catholic Church could give up making-ashamed the Protestant Fundamentalists, [with their] literal interpretation of the biblical story of creation and the Genesis counting of the years of the world, and accepted the probable year in which the present state of the world has started, namely five billion years before today. And I spoke to several scientists and they all said: there is great probability that the world as it looks today, started about five billion years ago, when, probably, the first great explosion started. Now this is scientific probability which can be changed by any new discovery in the valuation of the spectral analysis on which all this is based – on the relationship of movement and the different colors in the galaxies. But however this may be, let us suppose that the probability is very high and will be confirmed by further scientific researches. So the common presupposition now is that the present state of the world has started by a great explosion in the year five billion before Christ. Now what is gained for the doctrine of creation? I am astonished that the clever hierarchy in Rome was betrayed by this thing – usually they are not! The same physicists with whom I spoke said: of course, there might be this tremendous punctual concentration of reality – or almost punctual – out of which, then, the enlargement of the world came out. But they said: now how did it come to this concentration? We do not yet have a theory [about this, but we may find one. Now suppose there is a theory which shows preceding states in which perhaps this concentration from which our present world started can be explained in terms as processes in which the concentration took place. Then the year five billion is as worthless as the year of the Jewish Orthodox calendar of five thousand years. Now that is what I [123] [124]

wanted to show: this has nothing to do with the doctrine of creation, with the dimension of our ultimate concern which relates time to eternity and has the faith in the sense of a *concrete risk* of faith, that every temporal moment, however far we go in past and future, has a direct relationship to the eternal. And no astronomical theory about the past or the future – and the entropy theory is also a theory about the future; it is the death of cold, perhaps, before the universe will die, and not, as the old Stoics believed, a burning of the world. However this may be, the relationship of any moment of time to the eternal is not changed by the more or less complete verification of any astronomical theory.

So – and with this I conclude, up to now (I will continue a little more in this problem next Thursday) with the warning to theologians: do not rejoice and do not be sorry about *anything* which has scientific probability. And to the scientists and to the believers in science amongst us – to whom I *also* belong – don't transcend the realm of scientific research in the order of finite relations in order to produce a metaphysical or a religious matrix within which your research is going on. [But after this has been said, and while this is done, one should, as [a] theologian, be completely un-irritated by these processes and be certain of the fact that the ultimate itself is a screen which makes all these attempts alone meaningful, and for that very reason the problem is not to reject these attempts and to prove the truth of special contents, but to point to this one fundamental experience, which I have called "ultimate concern."|*Lecture XII[b]*, Nov. 10, 1955 [125]

We will finish today the discussion on religion and science. At the end of the Tuesday hour, I tried to show that religious symbols can neither be refuted nor confirmed by scientific results. In earlier periods, 1500 years ago, the problem was that from the side of science, religion was attacked, and the idea was that scientific results refute religious symbols. *Today* the problem is almost the opposite, namely that one has to be careful not to use present-day scientific results in order to confirm joyfully the truth of religion. Both ways are equally wrong and equally dangerous – that is the thesis of this whole section on religion and science, and that I tried to carry through in such a way that I showed that the earlier conflicts never were conflicts between merely scientific results and religious statements, but between worldviews, philosophical or religious, *behind* the scientific results which came into conflict with traditional religious forms. And I criticized both science and religion for not understanding this situation, for confusing the inquiry into the finite relationships of realities with each other, with the dimension of ultimate meaning as symbolized by them. Science does this by identifying religious presuppositions it has, consciously or unconsciously, with the scientific results itself. Theology does it by making, in the name of religious symbols, factual statements about the movements of finite realities. In both cases, a boundaryline [sic.] is trespassed; in both cases, a fundamental confusion of *dimensions* has taken place. [126]

I spoke then about Lamarck's metaphysics of mechanism, about the danger of using the law of entropy, of the death of warmth, in order to prove the idea of creation *once upon a|time* – not five thousand, but five billion years ago. I said that there is no difference between five thousand or five billions of years; the question always remains: what was before it? – if we think in temporal terms. But if we think in terms of the relation of the eternal to the temporal, then we are in a dimension which does not give the answer in any way to the periods in which the world has developed as we see it today. [127]

There is another rather interesting consideration, made by the famous physicist von Weizsäcker in Göttingen, who, in his book about the development of our cosmos, speaks about the historical element in physics. He says that not only *man* history, but that there is an historical element in the physical development of the universe itself. He

gives as an example the one-directed and non-circular development of the universe as we know it, also based on the law of entropy, of the death of warmth. And he says that the direction of time is known to us only because of the law of entropy, which is unambiguous, and not returning, so that the universe, from this point of view, must also be understood as historical, although human freedom is involved only in an infinitely small period, which we call, ordinarily, history. Now here again I would say: insofar as this is a physical knowledge, it remains doubtful, and some physicists with whom I spoke questioned very much this theory about the historical character of the universe. In any case, it is controversial, in the scientific sense of the word, and therefore cannot be used in order to confirm the Augustinian over against the Stoic interpretation of time. The Stoic interpretation of time is the circular one: once the world has started, then it has moved through many periods whereby the present is usually considered to be the last, and the first one is considered as the Golden Age, or the period of the Paradise, and after this worst-of-all periods will come to an end, the world will burn and a new circular movement of the same kind will start. [128]

Now this is metaphysics and religion. It is a religion which is based on the emphasis on natural processes, on the emphasis on the repetitious character of the seasons, on the circular character of the movements of the stars. Over against this Stoic circular idea of time, which we all will find in India and in many other places in the world, we have in Augustine the linear interpretation of history: it has a beginning, a moment of creation; it will have an end, the moment of consummation, and it runs from period to period through this limited amount of time and has a center, and this center is the appearance of the Christ.

Now this is a question of ultimate concern, and has to be discussed in connection with the interpretation of history, which is always basically religious and can express itself in metaphysical terms. But if now somebody comes – [such] as Mr. von Weizsäcker, who is a very religious man and a great physicist at the same time, I estimate him very highly – and says, “There is so much evidence for the law of entropy that the time of the universe has the character of directed and not of circular time,” then I would say this is a scientific hypothesis which cannot be used from the point of view of theology in order to confirm Augustine over against Aristotle and the Stoics, because it is quite possible that there is some unknown physical reality which overcomes the effects of the law of entropy and which turns the wheel back. It is not possible to refute the Stoics in terms of physical time, as it is not possible to refute Augustine on the same basis. So here you have another example for the need to be cautious about these things. There are tendencies in physical time which confirm Augustine; there are others which confirm Aristotle. Even if today, under the tremendous impression which the law of entropy has made on all of us, we are more inclined to accept the Augustinian interpretation, we must nevertheless be clear-minded and cautious enough to say that *we don't know*, on the basis of *physics*, which interpretation is ultimately true. We can say it only in terms of ultimate concern, and this doesn't give an answer to any physical question, this only answers the question of the meaning of history for us. It is an existential question, and not a physical one. [129]

Now I hope that this additional consideration, where the temptation is very great today, makes it even clearer to you what I mean. But now we come to another consideration where my position seems to be almost hopeless, namely the position of non-interference of the dimensions, the biological and anthropological problems. Now let us first say a few things about the biological problems.

Has religion to say something which biology, the doctrine of life, has to accept on

the basis of religious authority? If this were the case, then the conflict between the two realms would be hopeless. But I don't see any such necessity, and I will try to prove this now.

In biological consideration, as long as there is a philosophy of biology, there is a fight going on between mechanistic and organicistic [sic.] interpretations of life. These two considerations seem to lead to opposite results; in the one case, all life is a casual, contingent result of mechanistic [constellations which, according to the law of probability, has happened perhaps only once in five billion years; it couldn't have happened more often. Now I would call such a theory absurd. [130]

Less absurd is another theory which says: there was once upon a time a readiness of the inorganic matter to go over into organic forms by slow transitions, and perhaps such realities as viruses, which we have lately discovered, may have been transitory forms of this kind. Now this certainly is much more adequate to the law of scientific research which tries to avoid as many absurdities or improbabilities as possible.

But now the method itself of dealing with living bodies in biology, of which the human body is only one example: the answer is that from a philosophical point of view, one simply must say that the Gestalt, the living structure (which is my translation of the German word Gestalt), or the living entity which we call living being, precedes the mechanisms which occur within it. For this reason, I would say no amount of mechanical, and especially chemical, research of qualitative character, in the biological method, can deny that all these processes occur in a being which has a definite structure – or, as Aristotle called it, an inner telos, entelecheia, so that, however the chemical processes may be, if there is a seed of an apple tree, an apple tree will always come out. However distorted by climate and winds, it is an apple tree and nothing else.

Now this is the strong point in the organicistic [sic.] consideration. On the other hand, the strong point in the mechanistic consideration is that you can calculate in all living bodies the chemical exchange processes in quantitative terms. That is the situation. Now I cannot go into this. I am convinced [that in *all* reality, structure precedes law, structure precedes mechanical necessity, that reality itself is always – even in the subatomic realm – structured and that, as some physicists call it, there are physical Gestalten, physical living structures, or better, independent structures, within which the quantitative processes are going on. [131]

Now this is the scientific situation, and this determines not at all the scientific method, but largely the philosophical implications of the scientific method. No organicist ever did deny to biology the right to go as far as it is possible at all with the quantitative analytic method of describing and expressing in mathematical terms the chemical processes which are going on in a body. On the other hand, he would always say they occur *within* something, and you cannot explain this “within” by that which goes on within it; you must presuppose it. This is the methodological situation.

What about religion, in relation to this? If this is the discussion, we cannot decide, in the name of religion, for the one or the other. We can only decide for a strict observation of the biological facts, and these biological facts have two sides, the one is the quantitative exchange of mechanical processes and physical causes, the other is the structural reality, the Gestalt (as Gestalt philosophy calls it) within which these things will happen. These are the two points of view and within that, the whole biological world is going on.

Theology is able to accept the predominance of the one as much as the predominance of the other method and does not have to decide for the one or the other. Of course, theologians are much more [inclined to become organicists and mechanists because they [132]

believe that this saves the concept of freedom, and with it responsibility, etc., which belongs to the theological concept of man. But this is not the case. Theology can accept a completely mechanistic method of chemical analysis for all living bodies, including the human body, without being afraid of it, because the question of that which is the *result* of this, namely spontaneity, life, and ultimately spirit, are never dependent on the way in which the organic bearers of all this are understood in scientific terms. They can be understood in this way and that way. As a scientist and a philosopher of science, I would say it is absolutely impossible to understand living beings *without* the concept of Gestalt. But I would *also* say: if this concept is introduced – like *some* philosophers did in earlier times – as a special cause beside the other causes, then we come into a kind of miraculous interference into the chemical processes, which is equally wrong. Such was the character of the old vitalist philosophy, which is now dismissed by almost everybody.

But if we say this is the situation with living beings, they are bearers of something which can have ultimate concern – we ourselves – how these bearers are described and calculated in terms of description and explanation cannot be dictated by theology at all. On the other hand, science cannot dictate, by being predominantly vitalistic or mechanistic, how this must be so that if it is this way or that way, theology is accepted or refuted. All this is an impossible mixture of dimensions and in no way necessary.

This brings me to the last and decisive point, namely the doctrine of man – “psychology,” as my neurologist friend Professor Kurt Goldstein in New York always says, doesn’t exist; the only thing [which does exist is the doctrine of man, because the psychological [133] movements are not something which can be separated from the totality of man. He is definitively a Gestalt philosopher, and believes that man is a living Gestalt, a unity, a living structure, of a monistic character, and not a composition of body and soul. But here again philosophical, metaphysical, and even religious elements come into the picture. I agree with him very definitely and believe that is the most adequate way of dealing with man as a totality, but even this is not decisive. And even here we must be cautious (I speak very much against myself in this lecture today! – sotto voce) because I am glad if I can find something which *seems* to help theology and which is useful as apologetic weapons. But I know that these weapons, after a certain time, turn always against the theologian who uses them. For this very reason, and after a long life of this experience, I ask you not to use them at all, insofar as you are [a] theologian. But don’t give them to the others either! [laughter]. They will turn against them *also*. We don’t need these apologetic weapons at all. What we need is something quite different, namely an understanding of the dimension in which religion moves. And if we have *this*, then we can have, let us say, four different theories of man:

One: the so-called materialistic theory. It is very interesting that a Church father such as Tertullian was a Stoic materialist and never had any doubts that this is completely compatible with a very radical and even in his later years fanatical, affirmation of Christianity. He was not worried about a materialistic interpretation of man, about the understanding of the soul as a refined substance, if only this soul is able to have what we experience in ourselves as having, namely the possibility of deciding, of deliberation, [of [134] feeling responsibility, guilt, hope, ecstasy, ultimate concern. And there is no materialistic theory which can prove to us that we cannot have this – so we simply have it! And if somebody nevertheless tries to do it, then we can tell him, “Now listen, you want to tell us the truth, with your materialistic interpretation of man. What is truth?” And in this moment, if he really understands the meaning of this question – “Truth is the result of deliberation and decision, of the freedom of research and the freedom of error” – now

this lies in a dimension which has nothing to do, although it may be based on, the movement of atoms and electrons. I don't deny that it is based on them, that without them it doesn't exist. But the interesting thing is that these movements of electrons – or formerly atoms, in the primitive materialistic period – that these have the possibility of producing the atomistic theory and the materialistic philosophy. No materialist ever has explained how materialism can produce a materialistic theory, how matter and its movement can produce this. Or he must do something which, today, naturalism does – that is a very interesting movement, which shows how right we are here, in these discussions. The naturalists explained everything away. Now they have seen this is an impossible state because they would explain away themselves and their theory ... So they say: What we mean by nature is that it includes the aesthetic function of man, the possibility of creating works of art and even, if you want, they hesitatingly admit something like “religious experience.” All this is nature.

All right! Let us call all this “nature” instead of “universe,” “totality,” or “reality” – I don't mind. But in the moment in which naturalism has ceased to be reductionist – reducing everything to one level of reality – it has seen the impossibility in itself to refute things like what we called ultimate concern. [That is what I wanted to show, from the one theory. [135]

The other is the idealistic [theory]. Very often, in popular thinking, when you speak to somebody and he knows or feels that you are a theologian, then he calls you “idealistic.” And then I shock him and say, “I prefer to be a naturalist to being an idealist.” Idealism is much farther [sic.] away from Christianity than naturalism because idealism overlooks the reality of man as he is bound in matter, in unconscious strivings, in all that which depth psychology and sociology have shown to us. But even if one is idealist – and there are strong motives in the *epistemological* realm for idealism – then this is not a decision for or against Christianity.

Then there are other theories, the so-called parallelism theory: “There is the body, and there is the soul, and they go parallel.” This was the idea of Descartes and the Cartesian school, that what happens in the bodily world always has an analogy in the inner world of the soul, and God Himself is the ultimate wheel in this process which makes that these two machines are coordinated. Now this is a very abstruse theory, and philosophers have always tried to overcome it, but not very successfully. Now I don't mind this theory either; it has no bearing on the problems of what happens on this side and that side.

And if we have, then, a monistic theory, a Gestalt theory – which I personally prefer, and think is the true description of the human situation – then we can only say that that which is real in man is what the Greeks called soul, *psyché*, meaning life process, the dynamic power of his life process. And this dynamic power of a life process has two sides, the one side towards existence in time and space – this side we call “body,” it *embodies* itself in time and space; and the other side is “mind,” it is able to have relationship to universals, to principles, to laws, to norms, and is able to understand them and, beyond all this, to go into the ultimate problems of man's relationship to the eternal. All this is not a matter of physical or biological or psychological or sociological doctrine of man. All this is a matter of different theories, none of which contradicts essentially the situation of ultimate concern, and none of which *confirms* definitively the situation of ultimate concern. Here also we must be as cautious as in the other form of physics. [136]

This leads me to a last consideration, namely the problem of genesis and validity. This is a very important problem in all these discussions – the genetic problem in relationship

to the problem of validity. I hear again and again, “If you know how, e.g., religion or art or whatever it may be, comes into existence, then you have refuted it, then it has been shown that it is *nothing else than*.” Now this is a very poor kind of thinking. Everything has its genesis. Let us think about the genesis of love, of a love-relationship between a male and female. This love relationship, if you describe it genetically, has many causes: there is the chemical cause, which has to do with the sex substance of both sexes; there are the nervous dynamics in the body of each of them; there are longings of one for what he has not, and can have by the other one – all these things are there. There are many elements of anxiety, of loneliness, of guilt feelings, and there is finally something in which one individual being affirms another individual being in terms of surrender, trust, desire to be with him or her. Now this is the genesis. If you *say* that the fact that there are chemical processes participating in such a relationship |devaluates the meaning of such a love relationship, I hope those of you who have had an experience of a love relationship would reject that with great passion – not with fanaticism (that would show that you feel not very safe), but you would reject it with great passion, you would simply say: this is absurd; the value, the meaning, of this relationship, *in itself*, is independent of all those bearers which are, genetically speaking, responsible for it. You would not deny that the biological chemist shows all the chemical conditions which are necessary to drive man to woman and woman to man. You must accept them. They are the bearers of every love relationship in this realm. And you would *not* deny the psychologist to speak about the father-and-mother bondage, and the image which you seek unconsciously in choosing the object of your love – why should you? This is all true. Nevertheless, then finally there is love, and whether it is long or short, in the moment in which it does exist, it is a reality in itself, and no genetic interpretation of it can deprive it of its validity. [137]

Now the same thing is true of religion, i.e., of the state of being ultimately concerned. In this state *also*, all the chemical and physical presuppositions are present; you cannot deny them. And there are other things present which often have been used in order to devalue the meaning of religion. Here the genetic theory has taken the form of psychological or sociological explaining-away the content of religion. The psychological form, in primitive ages (I mean 50 years ago), had the form of saying that the gods are the creations of fear; and today, in a less primitive atmosphere in this respect, it is the father-image which is projected and made into a god. I think this is also very primitive, insofar as it is not even technically exact, because you cannot project anything without a |screen,* and the screen in this case *is* that which I call the experience of ultimate concern. If you have this experience, then you can do what the projector does, namely can have a little picture of the father, then you put it on the screen, but this screen is the ultimate, is the experience of the infinite, of the eternal, of the unconditional. And this *is not* the father, but the father is only the little picture which is put on it. Now this simple technical consideration is devastating for all projection theories, and you will hear and read, in the psychoanalytic literature, a lot of these projection theories. They all are *nonsense*, if they don’t do what the older and wiser projection theories did, for instance Feuerbach, more than 100 years ago, when he said that religion is a projection of our infinite desire and infinite love. Now if *this* is the case, then infinity is the screen and then this theory makes sense. [138]

But if we *have* that screen, namely ultimate concern, then we can say, “All right, now come with your psychology. You are probably right. And I know what it means to interpret the Calvinistic God in terms of father-image – or in this country, a little bit more of mother-image [smiling; laughter] – to see how the concrete traits are formed

by the actual experiences our unconscious has with our parents, with our early friends, with persons who have impressed us very early, even with experiences with nature, with dreams, and what not – everything! I give you all the apparatuses in the world for projection purposes – psychology, in that case. And I give you one more, namely “collective unconscious, —————”*[Remarks after the lecture] : The screen is the area of unconditional concern. The father- or mother-image can be projected onto the screen, thus deifying it into a god or goddess. [Question about Erich Fromm, who says that when we become mature, we should get rid of the authoritarian father-image of God]: But love then becomes the symbol for the unconditional, for Fromm. We had a whole evening’s discussion with him on the ultimacy of love. ... [as it is described in depth [139] psychology, which for sociological reasons projects a special type of religion in order to escape the miserable situation in this world, or in order to maintain the power of a ruling class, which Marx has called “ideology” – I grant you this also.

But now, after all this has been said, we are again in the same situation, namely the situation: what about the relationship of ultimate concern, namely the experience of ultimacy, which we all have, to these images? And then the answer is very clear: these images are more or less purified projections. They can be purified. There are criteria of purification. But they are, even so, projections. You cannot have images of the ultimate without the material of your daily experience, and if the collective unconscious creates such images, then it is the experience of the individual and collective unconscious which produces them. In this point, all the projectionists are right. But in the moment in which they mean that this is an explaining-away of that which is *meant*, in the religious act, in the act of faith, or ultimate concern (as I have called it), then they are completely wrong, and they are not even adequate to their technical job, namely to show *why* these projections are made by human beings unconsciously, in all periods of human history, and what the impact behind it is.

Now this again is a matter of genesis and validity. The genesis of the concrete images of the ultimate is a matter of much scientific research, and no theology should interfere with that research, especially not in the cases in which individual persons are subjected to psychoanalytic treatment, or in which social classes are criticized by sociological treatment.