Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich

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

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2025

(version: December 21, 2025)

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Lecture XVI, Nov. 29, 1955

We began the discussion of religion and philosophy, and the first thing I discussed last time was the difficulty in giving a definition of what philosophy is, because this is usually the expression of a special philosophy, and every philosopher who has a special vision of reality gives a different definition, when it comes to an exact definition. But instead of that, I gave a more general description, pointing to the fact that philosophy deals not with any *special* realm of being, but with the universal structure of being itself.

Now on this basis, the problem has to be continued in different directions. The one is a somehow personal one. Who *is* a philosopher? What does that word originally mean? What should it mean? What is the basic character of philosophers in the history of mankind, and especially of the Western civilization? We can say that philosophers always were people who were driven by the eros toward sophia, meaning wisdom (sapientia), or as the medieval philosophers defined it, the knowledge of principles. And "principle" meant the structures of being and of the good.

Now this general meaning presupposes a type of human being who is driven, on the one hand, by an ultimate passion – called "eros" by Plato. That for which they were struggling and for which they often became martyrs was a matter of ultimate concern for them. In this sense, they were religious – if religion is "being ultimately concerned." On the other hand, they wanted to fulfill this eros towards the really real, towards true being, in terms of clear and detached observation and description. They tried to go into the discussion of the structure of reality |in terms of that attitude which later developed [182]
as the scientific attitude.

So there are two elements in every philosopher, an element of ultimate concern which gives the passion, the eros, the driving power, to the philosopher; and at the same time, the detached attitude, the coldness of observation and of adequate description. In this polarity and this tension, all great philosophers were living. And you can observe how these two elements supported each other – the passion for the ultimate opened the eyes of the observer; and very often also were in tension with each other – the passion went beyond what *could* be observed. But there is no philosophy where there are not these two elements.

This is shown in the fact that philosophy could become the mother's womb out of which science and history have grown, and that, as we are never completely separated from our mother, even if she has died long ago, so science and history are never completely

separated from philosophy and those two elements, the passion for the ultimate and the conceptual sharpness and discipline.

Let me first make this more concrete. The frame of reference within which the physicists have seen and are seeing the universe of their inquiries, is philosophical. I just got a report about a discussion which took place – I think it was in New York – this weekend, where a very well known scientist gave a paper in a group of theologians, and his main point was that the metaphysical universe can never be eliminated in everything the physicist does (in this case, for instance, the problem of the original production of matter and its time and its space). Now I wouldn't say this is a confirmation |of the idea [183] of creation – I turned it against this in all the preceding lectures – but this man knew that he *cannot* presuppose *any*thing without doing it in a philosophical or metaphysical totality. It is always a vision of the totality of being which, consciously or unconsciously, determines the *frame* of their thought.

Now this means, even in scientific work an element of philosophy remains effective. Although the child of the mother-philosophy has become independent, it can never become completely independent; it always remains in the frame of an understanding of reality as a whole. Of course these elements are not supposed to interfere with research. If they did this, then the scientific mind [would have] to turn against philosophy, as it did for instance in the philosophy of nature of the romanticists in the middle of the 19th century; and the tension scientists feel against philosophy still *today*, especially against metaphysics, is rooted in the questionable claims of the Romantic philosophers of nature to solve physical problems in metaphysical terms.

But this was an aberration. The Romantic idea as such has returned, that *within* scientific research there are presuppositions, and these presuppositions can be described. When, today, physicists speak of "fields" or "structures" which *precede* the movements, then this is in the line of what the Romantic philosophers of nature tried to do, but they did it much too quickly, they superimposed metaphysics upon physical research – and that's wrong.

Even the most empirical way of dealing with physical problems is never pure physics – there is not such a thing. Pure physics are never *pure* physics, not because of the interference of |disturbing elements but because of the kind of question which one asks [of] [184] nature. Galileo was not a greater physicist than the Pythagoreans and, in the biological realm, Aristotle. But Aristotle and the Pythagoreans asked different questions and got different answers from nature. The questions asked in the period of the Renaissance were always intimately related to technical activity, which is *not* the case in Greece. Now these are presuppositions which make the ideal of pure science impossible. And that's what modern scientists acknowledge – and I think universally acknowledge. It was very interesting to me, when I had a talk with Einstein one day, and he sticked, even against the better evidence of today, to his naturalistic worldview which he had learned in the 19th century and which brought with him a Newtonian deterministic whole of atomic movements. He said: "I know that today, in the light of the theory of quanta, this system, this metaphysical presupposition, is shaken, is not unambiguously valid any more, as it seemed to be in the period of Newton and ever since. But nevertheless, I believe in it, and I am convinced that one day it will prove to be the *right framework* of the physical worldview again."

Now here you have an example of a man whom you certainly cannot accuse of *not* being a methodologically adequate physicist [some laughter] who saw the importance of the presuppositions. Now up to today, his hope has not been justified – I am very

doubtful whether it will be. But now these younger physicists are *also* aware of *their* metaphysical presuppositions and implications, and they confess that, very openly, and I think that is a good situation. |But if this is the case, then this also includes the element [185] of metaphysical passion, which you can observe in all the great physicists beginning with Newton himself, and all the following physicists.

So philosophy, because of its dual character of being a matter of passion and a matter of detached observation at the same time, is present, even in scientific research, in both respects, which again is an answer to the question not only "religion and philosophy" but also "religion and science."

Now the historian (we spoke about him fully and about the different levels of his work) is in the same way, consciously or unconsciously, a philosopher. And those people who want to write a history of salvation and at the same time deny philosophy, simply don't know what they are doing – and they could be pardoned if they were primitive, but unfortunately they are not.

It's quite obvious that every task of the historian, beyond the finding of facts, is dependent on valuations of historical factors. What has *effect* [a fact?] on man as acting in history? [?] To answer such a question, you must consciously or unconsciously have a doctrine of the nature of man. Many presentday factual historians, in all realms of life – take simply the history of economics: there you *have* presuppositions about the nature of man, and it was the false presupposition of classical economics to believe that man can *economically* be defined as that being which follows the laws of the market, buying at the lowest possible price and selling at the highest. Actually, the psychology of man is absolutely different from this law, which is a mere abstraction and can be used for mathematical equations as they appear in economics today. |*Real* human beings like to [186] pay more for something, even if they could pay less, in many cases, because they believe it is better – or simply to show something [some laughter] – innumerable motives which are not defined in this way. Now these motives are all consequences of human nature, and they must be understood in terms of the different forces in human nature. The economic will, as it is called, is different in every group, in every social class, in every religious situation. The economic will in original India is something quite different from that in presentday America, and it makes no sense to bring them under one and the same denominator. This means the economist presupposes a doctrine of the nature of man; and a doctrine of the nature of man, however much biology and psychology and sociology are involved in it, has fundamental philosophical presuppositions, as I don't even need to show, in this moment.

But even the act of finding historical facts has philosophical presuppositions, namely the decision, "Which facts, out of the infinite amount of happenings in every infinitely small moment of time, should be called historically relevant facts?" Now if you ask this simple question and imagine for a moment that we are together here for 50 minutes, that in these 50 minutes, in the bodies and minds of each of us, more things happen than all the books of the world could write down, if you describe what actually happens in the subatomic moments of time and in the half-unconscious elements of the soul – but you don't even mention this class in your history books, except [if] something very dramatic happens in it. But to say that something is very "*dramatic*," you have a principle of selection. And these principles of selection are dependent on your understanding of human nature and |human history. So facts are also in the realm of philosophy; there are [187] no pure facts, there are always facts described in terms which transcend the pure fact and show them according to principles which in themselves have nothing to do with the

facts.

The historian must evaluate his sources, their reliability, and this again is not independent of an understanding of human nature. In the moment in which a historical work implicitly or explicitly gives assertions about the meaning of historical events for human existence, then the *philosophical* presuppositions of history are evident. Again, where there is philosophy, there is expression of an ultimate concern, there is an element of faith; however hidden it may be, there is passion for something ultimate *beside* the *justified* and *necessary* passion of the historian for pure facts.

Now I think these considerations show the unity of human nature in all these functions. These functions are within each other; they are not *beside* each other, and if we better understood this simple fact of the within-each-otherness of all human functions, many foolish mistakes about problems of religion, philosophy, science, and history could be avoided.

Now all this shows that in spite of the fundamental difference of the philosophical consideration of the world, and the religious concern about that which is ultimate in being and meaning, there is a basic unity between them. One has spoken on this basis about "philosophical faith." The existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers has written a book which is translated Philosophical Faith. I don't like this term. The term seems to me misleading because it seems to confuse the two elements, |philosophical truth and the [188]
truth of faith. Further, the term seems to indicate that there is *one* philosophical faith – as one has often called it, the philosophie perennis, the "perennial philosophy." Now this is a very *questionable* term, and I would join all the historians who would tell us how much *non* – perennial things always happen in the history of philosophy! And I would say, instead of that: only *one* thing is perennial, namely the *Question*, the *Question* about the structure of being, about ultimate reality, which is the philosophical question, but the answers are *not* eternal, not even the mystical answers, which usually are taken to be the patterns of an eternal philosophy. In this moment I would defend nominalism – which means quite a lot, if I do so! [smiling]. There is a continuous process of interpenetration of philosophical elements and elements of faith. But there is no philosophical faith, and there is no *one* philosophical faith. Therefore I prefer to drop this term, which makes the mistake of connecting philosophy and religion in a way which makes the difference impossible.

Now we had said (and this is the result of these considerations so far) that there is ultimate concern – and that means faith, or religion – in every creative philosophy, in every philosopher who is passionately concerned about being itself and not only a special section of being. But the opposite is also true: there is philosophical truth in the truth of faith, although they are never identical. We have seen that the truth of faith is expressed in symbols, while the truth of philosophy is expressed in concepts, and the whole problem now comes down to the problem of the relationship of concepts and symbols. | [189]

One thing we can see immediately. Most philosophical concepts have mythological ancestors, and here philosophy (which we have compared with the mother, for science and history) is seen itself as being the daughter of a much earlier mother, namely the mythological worldview. It is very interesting to see how, in early Greek philosophy, the fundamental concepts [such] as matter and form are born out of mythological and cosmological concepts, and how these concepts, through the whole history of philosophy, still have something which reminds of their birthplace, namely man's mythological imagination.

In the moment in which man's philosophical consciousness appears, the conceptual

elements which are present in all mythological visions are developed – and that's what philosophy does. This of course presupposes a high valuation of the myth. There is not a chaotic, meaningless imagination which is the creator of the myth, but an encounter with reality expressing itself in bunches of symbols which we call myths. Therefore these myths have altogether an element within themselves which can be developed philosophically in the moment in which the philosophical consciousness has arisen.

Now for instance, in the idea of gods, or God, a lot of conceptual elements are present which have been developed, step by step, by Greek and modern philosophers. For instance, and first of all, the concept of being. If you say that the gods have a higher being, more power-of-being, more meaning of being, have relation to time and space different from that which we have to it, causality and substance, etc. – if this is said about the god in the mythological language of the most primitive child, then this language includes a large amount of philosophical problems, |problems of being and its structure, problems [190]
of life – the gods are living, and they are subject to the ambiguities of life; or they are beyond them – the concept of spirit, of unity and diversity, of quantity and quality: all these concepts are present in the primitive vision of a divine being who comes to earth and does something there. There, being and causality, and time and space, and life and Spirit, and unity and diversity – all these concepts are present, but they are undeveloped; they are in the mother's womb of mythological vision, but they have not reached the independence of rational structure. In the symbol of creation – which is older than the Christian idea of creation, although the Christian idea has special characteristics – in this idea, concepts like finitude (of course, being created, being creaturely, means being finite), or fundamental anthropological realities such as anxiety, are involved. And if one speaks of the creation of man, then the concept of freedom and reason are involved. For instance, in the symbol of the image of God, or the symbol of the fall of Adam, or of the distortion of the original world, in *all*myths, [there is] implied the concept of man's essential nature, and of his conflict within himself, his existential estrangement, etc. In all myths, conceptual elements are present, and philosophy has nothing to do but to draw them out, to *de-velop* them out of their involvement, and that is what the philosophers do.

This also is the reason why theology is possible. Only because every religious symbol has conceptual potentialities is *theo-logy* possible; the -logos can be applied to these symbols. If these conceptual elements were not in the religious symbols, this would be impossible. | [191]

In other words, philosophy is implied in every symbol of faith. But this does not determine the movement of philosophical thought, just as philosophy does not determine the character of one's ultimate concern. Symbols of faith can open the eyes of the philosopher for qualities of the universe which otherwise would not be recognized by him. But faith, religion, does never command a definite philosophy. The myths and their conceptual elements can be understood in many different philosophies, and these philosophies have to fight with each other with the strictest means and tools of logical analysis. Here I see the function of the sharpening of the tools, which was done in the 19th century in epistemological terms, and is being done in the 20th century in logical terms – in terms of logistics and symbolic language.

Now these two methods of sharpening the tools are necessary, and I hope things will develop – and I believe there are indications that they are developing already, as they developed towards the end of the 19th century when the leaders of the Kantian school in Europe (which was also the epistemological school, the school of doctrine-of-knowledge)

– people like Nikolai Hartmann and others – suddenly discovered that you cannot be an epistemologist without being a metaphysicist. They discovered, *in the very school itself*, that you cannot ask the question "How can I know?" without knowing what knowing is, and to know what knowing is means having a concept of being and knowledge and their relationship to each other. This discovery was the turning point where the philosophy of the 19th century (which was nothing but sharpening knives) started cutting again. And now today the logical positivists, or however |they call themselves, do the same thing, and [192] sometimes the knives are so sharp that they don't cut any more but break. In any case, the purpose of doing this is finally undercut, namely, to cut into reality, and to get out of reality its true essence, its true structure. This development will take place now in the same way in which it took place at the end of the 19th century, with the epistemological predominance.

But however this may be, these tools are needed, and their sharpening is necessary; but they do not prejudice, in the name of faith, any special philosophy. And it is *good* that in the creative periods of the Roman Catholic Church, before the Counter-Reformation, not only Platonic but also Aristotelian, and later on not only Aristotelian but also Platonic, philosophy were admitted, and, beyond this, Augustinian voluntarism, and others.

Kantianism was often combined with Protestantism. I remember when I was still a very young high school boy, I heard a lecture from a famous professor of theology of that time, at the Berlin University, who said that as Plato is the philosopher of the Greek Orthodox and Anglican Church, as Aristotle is the philosopher of the Roman Catholic Chuch, so Kant is the philosopher of the Protestant Church. I was deeply impressed, but not convinced! And I am today less than ever! But this is not adequate to say. There are philosophical possibilities open to interpret the conceptual elements of *all* kinds, and even Locke and Hume are not excluded if you take them as hidden metaphysicians. If you take them simply as epistemologists, then they wouldn't help you very much, |but [193] they are much more than this: they are hidden metaphysicians.

So I think *today* we are able to use a philosophical movement, which we usually call "existentialism" (and which is the other pole, so to speak, of logical positivism) which goes so concretely into the real human situation that some philosophers of the naturalistic tradition are worried about this existentialist development as much as they are worried about logical positivism: they have the feeling that the one does not go into the matter, it remains in tool-sharpening; and the other goes so much into the matter that it becomes poetry, and bad psychology; and that is the situation in which many philosophers see the problem today.

I see it differently. I believe that existentialism today is a way of expressing, in a very different form (which didn't exist before as a philosophical movement) the problems which are implied in myth, to which I have referred today.

Now this is the situation in more general terms. This leads to different, more concrete problems with which I will deal next time. One of them is the problem whether philosophy *by itself* can produce answers to the problem of human existence, to the problem of our ultimate concern. It is the famous question of natural theology. "Natural theology" means that there are some realms of our knowledge of the ultimate – of truth of faith – – within which it is possible to reach contents by a mere philosophical procedure. Now how this is possible is one of the problems which are especially discussed today between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, |and are of great importance for the relation of [194] philosophy and theology. This is the one problem, with which we have to deal. The other problem is an application of what I said in principle, and this application is especially

needed in order to make my point completely convincing, namely how special philosophies, and special philosophical problems (naturalism and idealism, nominalism and realism, static and dynamic philosophy, etc.) – how in the solutions given by the philosophers to these mere philosophical problems the two elements which I have distinguished in the beginning of this lecture, *appear*, *are manifest*, and can be seen, namely the element of detached observation, in [the] special sense philosophical element, and on the other hand the element of ultimate concern, the element of faith. Now I believe that it is possible, almost page by page, to analyze a philosopher from the point of view of this distinction.

I will close with a personal experience. When I first read John Dewey, I was told, "Now here you have a philosopher without any religious and metaphysical presuppositions." After two pages, I had discovered a *dozen* – and that, I will show next time.