

Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich

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We started to give an analysis of our present situation with respect to religion and culture. The reason was that art is excessive in its style for a special situation. What I wanted to communicate is the expressive power of the visual arts which we have seen for the understanding of our present world situation.

The first point was the question of man becoming an object. The way in which this has happened in industrial society was described by man becoming, by that which he makes himself, namely the tool, and in a fuller and more refined sense, the comparatively independent reality of the machine.

It is very frequent today, in our literature of cultural criticism, to give all guilt, all responsibility, to the machine as such, and to attack our age as "Machine Age." To prevent this unambiguous negation of the machine, I gave a kind of praise of automation, which is produced by the building of machines, namely taking away all those functions of man as man which can be mechanized. Nothing which is creative in man can ever be taken over by a machine, but that which can be brought into mathematical equations and can be brought into a mechanically calculated and managed process, can be taken over in principle by the machine. This is a point of view for our valuation of what has been called the artificial brain – you know these calculating machines which can do in a few seconds what hundreds of men could do in a year, if you put the right thing into them. And this of course is always the fundamental difference: man can make the artificial brain, but the artificial brain cannot make man, because in man are united all levels of reality, but they are united in a center which decides and creates. This makes all the difference! I know that many people are very much worried [about the existence of the artificial brain and who do something else very foolish: they interpret man's *use* of his brain, man's creativity which always uses the human brain, in terms of the artificial brain. They derive the creator from the creation. They derive that which is completely mechanized, and can be mechanized, from that which makes the mechanization possible, namely man's inventive analysis of reality and synthesis of technical tools. [376]

This means that we don't need to be afraid about a dissolution of man's creativity in calculable functions. This is never possible because the functions are always the product of a creative center. This difference is decisive. But of course the *consequences* for man's interpretation of himself as an object are tremendous in the moment in which this confusion is maintained and in which creator and creation, in which man's freedom and the

tool which he produces in the power of his freedom, are confused.

Another of these objectifying powers is something which you meet in your psychological studies. I was in a school in New York two days ago where the president told me that by far his biggest department is the department of psychology, although it is a school, mostly an evening school, for people who are in business or [the] professions. And I asked him how is that understandable? The answer was that all the industrial enterprises needed psychologists who are able to use the mechanized methods of test psychology. This means that much of what belongs to man is now subjected to the method of mechanical connections and dependences.

Let me say something about this test method. Test in itself is nothing objectifying. [The witness before the court *tests* something. But the test method uses those elements [377] of man which can be mechanized, which can be brought down to the functions of an artificial brain, or of a Frankenstein, or of a product which acts like a man but does not have the elements of spontaneity. Now there are many of these elements, and by skillful order of the test you can find out the quickness of reaction, the ability of perception, and many other things like that; but if you don't count on one thing, in all these test methods: you don't count on the possibility of man, in the next moment *after* the test, to create in himself something which had not been reached before by the test method and which changes all the results of the test method. If you, as business executive, accept some worker for a difficult task and have him tested by the work-psychologist, then you can see tendencies in him which in this moment are predominant. But it may be that the same day, he experiences something at home which produces in him a catastrophic reaction and to which he must make a creative answer – or it might be a destructive answer. In both cases the test is valid only in a limited way. Of course the Tendenz [tendency] of interest and skill are still there, but they are changed in the totality of the personality. Now this means that we have to say: it is a highly abstract group of functions which are under inquiry – but no more than this. The center of the personality is never under inquiry. And if you want to have a person for something in which life-elements play a role, the limits of the test method have come. Imagine for a moment the absurdity that you choose your husband or your wife on the basis of a family tester (which perhaps will be a job for tomorrow!). Now if you do this, then you will [certainly find out that he or [378] she has a tendency towards greed or towards waste – you can do that – that he or she is able to perceive quickly new changes on the street or in the cooking which ordinarily are not so easily observed. All these things you can find, and they can fill a whole book, if you want, and then you have the person, and you decide, on the basis of this test, you want to marry her or him or not. Now this is the absurdity which in this very radical case shows how absurd these methods are if they are observed for more than realms of possible abstraction from the totality of the personality. There they *can* be used. If they are used for the valuation of the personality *as a whole*, then they are absurd and can never produce a life relationship. Here you have methods which produce objectivation, which consider man as an objective thing. It is very interesting and perhaps not too well known to you because you did not have much experience about it, but the Europe had [it] with the dictators, that even a dictator of such an uneducated past like Hitler, was an excellent psychologist from the point of view of test psychology. In his *Mein Kampf*, which is his basic book, he developed the psychology of mass guidance, and insofar as you can abstract from man, in terms of mass society (to which I come immediately), all those elements in which his freedom of decision is involved, just as far as you can do this you have the most powerful tool a dictator can have, much more powerful than storm

troopers or armies, namely the guidance of a whole nation in[to] those realms in which the individual resistance doesn't exist, in which you can calculate the reactions by test experiments. |

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This leads me to a more fundamental anthropological problem that belongs here, the problem of conditioned reflexes. You know that this is the most beloved Russian theory because it was a Russian who invented it, Pavlov, and today the Russian philosophers – if we call them like that (at least the interpreters of the system) – are determined by this idea. But unfortunately there is so much truth in this idea that many people in the Western world also have accepted this truth and have now generalized it into a doctrine of man: man is a bearer of conditioned reflexes, so if you condition him, then the outcome will be as you want it to be. And we are here in the sphere of two books which have carried through this caricature to the most radical point. The one is Huxley's *Brave New World*, and the other is the year, 1984, by Orwell. These two books are completely dependent on the theory of conditioned reflexes and use this theory to the extreme. The dictators also did it in the concentration camps and in many other ways – marching, working in gangs, etc. And they had a very good result, especially in the concentration camps where they wanted to transform human beings completely into objects determined exclusively by conditioned reflexes. That was the meaning of these institutions, which had no meaning otherwise because when they were in full swing, there were no enemies any more. But the intention was to point within a whole nation, places where the whole nation is subjected to radical conditioned reflexes. Not everybody was in the concentration camp; but the fear of being in it was enough to produce, even in the others, as much conditioned reflexes as the dictators wanted – *but not quite as much* – and this is the important thing to learn from these experiments in which theory | became horrible, atrocious practice, namely that there a resistance still was left. I know a man who is now in a very important position in Hamburg, an old friend of mine, who was for 12 years in concentration camps and prisons and who kept his resistance under all these conditions and was able to assert his spiritual freedom, his freedom of finite creativity under conditions in which many broke down, but not all of them, and perhaps comparatively few of them. And the finite freedom was still preserved in opposition to the conditioned reflexes. Now here you see – and that is why I emphasized this – because as the title of a book says: *Ideas Have Consequences* [by Weaver, with blurb on the jacket by P.T. – Ed.]. And the doctrine of conditioned reflexes, the test method, and all the rest, are not simply ideas which are harmless, but they *can* have consequences if they are tools in the hands of people who are interested in transforming human beings into objects.

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All this happened, as I already pointed to, in a special type of society, a type which we call mass society. In a mass society, the individual characteristics are taken away. The word “mass” is a physical concept, and in a physical mass we have a quantity of moving matter in which all parties move in the same direction with the same gravity with which the mass itself is moving. The characteristic thing in a physical mass is that the independent movements of the particles have no effect on the movement of the mass as such. They are deprived of their independence, or the independence has become irrelevant for the mass. Now that is what happens in mass society. Mass society is a society in which the individual reactions which have the character of spontaneity or finite freedom, are of | no importance for the movement of the whole. The word “mass society” has little to do – under certain circumstances, it has something to do – with great masses. But the *characteristics* of mass society can be seen in very small groups. The most famous example is a theater in which someone suddenly cries “Fire!” – and in

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this moment the reaction of everybody is, for the first moment, *saute qui peut!* – [let] him who can, save himself! And everybody runs toward the exit, and all the horrors which then happen are the results of this mass instinct, in which the individual characteristics of the often highly sophisticated and individualized people are almost completely gone, in such a situation. A few *minutes* after the panic, the individual is reestablished again, and he may be ashamed that in this moment he ceased to be a spontaneous free-acting individual, that he has become a particle of the mass, moving like the mass as a whole. So it is in gangs, where one leader gives the word “Let’s do this!” and then they all lose their independent judgment. It is in crusades, where larger masses are moved for a special purpose in the same way. And there are many other examples. But they are examples only for the character of what a mass is; they are *not* examples for mass society because they all are transitory. Mass society is long-lasting – of course, not eternal, or endless, but long-lasting; while the others are short and transitory – often very short.

Now what happens in a long-lasting mass society? The individual resistance against the movement of the mass as such – the activities and the ideas and the conventions – is reduced (slowly, but safely); and is reduced more and more, ideally to a point where it is of [no] influence on the movement of the whole any more. This is the definition of a mass society. This takes much [time, perhaps decades, perhaps centuries, but somehow] [382] then the mass has developed. We have now two developments in the whole world, which go in the direction of mass society. I gave you many examples already; now I come to the overall picture.

There are two ways of pressures which do this. The one is the predominantly external pressure – this is the East, what we usually mean the Communist system of totalitarianism. There we have a pressure to mass society by the external means, which I partly described in pointing to concentration camps (they are working-camps now), but there are other ways too. In the West, in our Western civilization, it is not predominantly external pressure – although this also is given, as in the East psychological pressure also is given – but it is a hidden psychological pressure. If we describe such things, I must always ask you: don’t make them into either-or’s – life is never like this. There is much propagandistic influence of a hidden and often psychological character also in the East; merely external pressure never works in the long run. That is what all politicians and statesmen know, or should know. On the other hand, in our Western world the influence toward mass society is not only psychological one, but it is also supposed by internal power, especially economic power.

Now which are these influences? We will come to them after I finish this general survey about the situation, but I must name them now. One of them, the earliest – and emphasized mostly in *Brave New World* and 1984 – is the education to adjustment. Whenever you speak with educators, you can hear: “He is a very good educator; all the pupils in his class are well-adjusted.” Now I could say, “They are well-adjusted to what?” If he then answers, “They are well-adjusted to behave in the class so that we can work together,” then it is alright; that is good adjustment. [If they say they are adjusted to] [383] the general standards of the way in which one should think and act, then I would say this “adjustment” is adjustment to mass society and is a fundamental way of preventing people to remain non-conformists and to say No! And a teacher who tells me, if I ask him, “How often do your pupils say *no* to what you say, either in papers or in questions?” – and he says either “Usually they don’t” or “They don’t dare!” [laughter], or something like that, then I would say this is a very bad teacher. And one of the main criteria of the good teacher is that he creates so much independent thinking that they reject the

teacher, not malignantly or with hostility, but in terms of their own thought; then they have really learned something from him, namely the ability of dialectical discussion about problems which can anyhow be solved *only* through the process of Yes and No, and never through a monolithic statement of the teacher to the pupils.

The other ways of hidden psychological influence are the means of mass communication, to which I already referred and which are so much discussed today. These means of mass communication (the older one, the newspaper, the radio; and the newer one, the movie and television) are extremely strong, even to those who listen or look at them very little. They are strong because they fill the atmosphere and produce a language, produce connotations, indirectly even in those who are not addicted to one of these influences, but who keep fairly away from them ... But they cannot really keep away from them because the whole civilization is filled with them. And they are most powerful means for producing mass society – people who know the same things, they have learned from these means of mass communication: people who think the same thing, [who make the same decisions, who have the same ideals, the same conventions, the same criticisms and rejections, etc. [384]

Now I leave the realm of intellectual influences which work *directly*, and come to others which *indirectly*, namely the industrial society qua industrial society. There are different forms. The first is industry itself, namely using men as cogs in a machine. Here you see an example that we never should say “Never!”, that this kind of work which is done in the assembly line is most dehumanizing for man – it certainly is. But on the other hand, it can be taken over, and automation means it *will* be taken over. Then at least some of this form of making man into cogs of a machine is reduced. But there is still more left than we can even imagine in our fantasy: work which tends to dehumanize man because it makes him do things which in principle should be done by the machine.

One of the implications of this is that the worker – and this is even true if automation is fully developed – doesn’t know what he works. Now that has been very often noticed. The craftsman who makes a table or shoe, sees everything from the material he buys to the finished shoe which he sells, and he knows all the processes and all the irrationalities and all the tricks of the trade. This gives creative joy, because an element of freedom and creativity is left. If you only push one place all the time with your hammer, or if you work even more than this, but don’t see what the result is and are not responsible for it, then the creative element is almost destroyed. This was one of the things which made the difference between the old crafts, where people worked usually fourteen to sixteen and more hours, and the laborer today who works perhaps only eight hours [or even less, but who doesn’t see what he does and has lost what I would like to call the creative eros – again I want to refer to Mr. Marcuse’s book on Civilization and Eros, who dwells on this. [385]

Now I come to another consequence, namely the reduction of working time. Nothing should be better than this. And it was a tremendous thing when this reduction took place, from sixteen to eight hours, step by step, and when children were excluded from participating in this kind of work. But now something else occurred, namely a lot of leisure time. The question now in the foreground of all social educators – social psychologists (social psychologists, if they are not only test psychologists but who deal with human beings), namely the question: how to form leisure time? What can be done about it? – Leisure time is largely commercialized too. To the degree in which it is commercialized, it has little to give in terms of creativity of one’s own. And this perhaps is the worse thing about the means of mass communication: they not only unify, but they make creativity

impossible. If all your imagination is taken care of by television and similar things, then your own imagination dies off. The pictures which lie in your minds are given to you by the leaders of the mass means of communication, but there is no filled leisure time where there is no creativity. Man is essentially creative – for this he is created, as the Paradise story tells. If this creativity is taken away from him, if only a few participate in it and they, only under the point of view of setting (I come to this immediately), then there is no possibility of a meaningful leisure time. And I think many ministers should work together here with the social psychologists, the politicians, the educators, in order to think about a nation which has managed to take away from most people most of the mechanical functions and which has thrown them into utter emptiness [with respect to the time which is given to them and which now *could* be used by them. [386]

The industrial way has another side, namely the commercial side. This side has the problem of competition. When I spoke of objectivation, and mass society, I again come down to a question which is in all our minds, named competition. I don't speak about competition in terms of the hostility which it produces – the Business School, which has asked me to have discussions with them about ethical problems in relation to business, they feel that the ethical problem is only one of them – the hostility against the successful competitor, or the use of immoral means of competition, and all this. But there is another problem involved in it, namely the conformism, the mass society, which is created by competition. In order to be a successful seller, you must adapt yourselves to the rules of the game, namely to the customer who is “always right.” And if you are a salesman, in the more noble sense of the chief executive of a big concern, or a salesman like the man whose death is described in this famous play [Death of a Salesman], who lives on the road all the time, and has only one principle: to play the customer in order to sell – then you are depersonalized. This depersonalization is the tragic implication of that play, whose tremendous success seems to me based on the fact that so many people in our competitive society felt hit by it. Personality has to be sold, so to speak, in order to sell. You cannot sell as long as you have maintained your creative personality; the adaptation to the norms of the game, of competition, are tremendous. And this refers not only to the salesman on the street, it also refers to the four million chief executives who have to conform themselves like the man in Point of No Return. This famous novel, which also was in a movie – there you can [see the whole tragedy of the force to adjustment, under the necessity of competition. [387]

This leads finally to the problem of advertisement. Advertisement is the means of conditioning the customer for special products. Now this means that the products are not conditioned by the needs felt by the customer, but by the need to sell, and especially by the need to sell ever-new things in a dynamic society – to *over-sell*, all the time, in order to keep going. This gives perversion of needs ... Formerly there were needs, and there still are needs of all kind, and industry and work tried to serve them. Now there are needs produced which didn't exist before, and are produced in order to make selling possible. This distorts the fundamental meaning of production, to satisfy needs, almost into its opposite. We come into the vicious circle of gadgets, the vicious circle which produces means and ends, and these ends become means again, and there is no end of this circle of means and ends. If you ask “For what?”, the answer would be “For production.” And if you ask “Production for what?”, you would answer “For gadgets.” And so it goes on, and there is no ultimate end, no overall end, as it was in a period in which needs decided what was to be produced. So we have a total society which doesn't do anything but produce, not in order to produce the fulfillment of needs, but in order

to create new needs and then new productions for these new needs. This is the vicious circle in which we all become ruined because every real time for contemplation, for the “vertical line” towards the eternal, is taken away by the dynamic of this society in which the end, the purpose, is *not* the end, but becomes again a means for *more* production! | [388]

Now you see what I mean [by] dehumanization, objectivation. And there is still a little bit more we have to discuss next time, and then I will go fully into the problem of education.