Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich: Lecture XXXIV

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Transcribed by JJ Warren and Michaela Durst

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We have discussed the formal ethics, so to speak—the fundamental problem of ethics and religion. Today I come to a special section of the general ethical realm, namely personal ethics, in contrast to communal ethics; or as we also could say: individual in contrast to social ethics. In both of these realms, the problem "Culture and Religion" has a large amount of implications and demands a large amount of answers. Let me first give you a survey on what individual ethics means by speaking about different concepts of individuality.

The word "individualism" is used very much as a critical word against special forms of behavior or special structures of society, in our period of history. This word is valid to a certain extent—one *can* speak of modern individualism—but it is valid only in a limited way, because it uses the word "individual" in an undifferentiated, unqualified way. The first thing we must do, when we deal with such a concept as individualism, is to make the qualifications referring to such a term.

Individualism can mean three different things. Let me call the one the religious concept, the other the rational concept, and the third the Renaissance concept. These three are by no means identical and must be discussed in a special way, and it is quite possible that *some* of these concepts are to be combined with opposite concepts in different structures.

The religious concept is the concept of the infinite value of the individual soul in the face of God. The word "infinite value" is not directly biblical; the biblical phrase would be, perhaps, "object of the divine love." But this is true of every human being; there are no differentiation |in this. And this is so self-understood in a Christian culture that [433]
we don't remember any more *opposite* possibility, namely the possibilities that the gods look at men according to their hierarchical order, and that consequently *some* men are by birth nearer to the gods than the others; that the earthly hierarchy is a mirror of the heavenly hierarchy; and that therefore, after death, the religious-sacramental position a man has on this earth, the consecrated position in the hierarchy of beings—and finally in the hierarchy of man—is decisive for his ultimate destiny.

Against this the development—to which I come later when I speak about the concept of person—has brought about an attitude which comes to absolute fulfillment in Christianity, namely that the individual human being, that his soul, is immediately related to God, in complete indifference to his status in time and space; it is dependent on

other factors: on his justice (on righteousness), and on the righteousness of God, which is fulfilled in His forgiving love.

This kind of individualism is always in the basis of Christian thinking. But don't forget that this Christian individualism is *only* valid seen from the Christian tradition with respect to the relation of God and man, or of man to God. It has *not* the consequence to abolish hierarchical orders in time and space. There the equality before God, the evaluation of the individual, is dependent on the hierarchical order as a whole.

Now this is the one concept of individualism, and Christianity should be clear that this is in the relation between God and man and not in the relation between *man* and man. |There, collectivism, hierarchy, aristocracy, and many other forms can prevail without [434] interference from the point of view of the individual meaning before [i.e. significance to] God.

The second type is rationalindividualism. The rational individualism is the result of the development of the modern mind since the second half of the Renaissance, and is based on the idea that the divine *logos* is present in every individual mind and makes it possible for every individual mind to act according to the principles of reason. Of course this concept of reason is not the deteriorized concept of reason*ing*, which we use today in the deteriorized philosophies of the 19th century; but it is the classical concept of reason, reason as a structure of the human mind and the structure of the world which is encountered by the human mind—reason as structure of *meaning*, in all realms of life, in theoretical as well as in practical.

Now this concept of reason is applied to every individual human being, and the presupposition is that every individual is able to develop, out of this potentiality, actual rationality. The people of Enlightenment were not stupid enough to think that people *are* reasonable, but they were convinced that people can *become* reasonable, because they all have potentially the same rationality, and if they are developed in the adequate way, by educational and political institutions, they can come to the age of reason, to the age of rationality in themselves and generally speaking.

This produces the individualism which underlies democracy, namely the rational individualism of every one able to make decisions about universal problems, theoretical as well as practical, on the basis of the development of his own rationality. This of course has the consequence |that every individual is ultimately isolated from the other one, in the [435] development of his own rationality. The classical philosophical expression of this situation is Leibniz's monadology, his doctrine that the world concists of monads, each of which is developing within itself, each of which is more or less clear or dark consciousness—even in the inorganic matter, there are innumerable monads of this type; they have a very dark consciousness in the inorganic matter, a lighter one or brighter one in the realm of living beings; and a potentially complete one, namely the state of rationality, in the human monad, the human which makes man man. Now this monad develops within itself and has no windows and doors, as Leibnitz says, towards other monads. Every monad and his development of rationality is completely included in itself. This is the classical philosophy of society, in contrast to a philosophy of community. It is society which consists of atomized monads, which are beside each other, which have no possible communion with each other, and if they communicate with each other, they do it by signs, by signs which are mutually understood, but there is no participation of the one in the other, and each is left to his own inner development.

This has many consequences, for instance for language: language is a means of communication; external signs are enough because words and letters are nothing but signs in

the social cooperation which makes this cooperation possible. I may make here a footnote about the new language, for which I am too old, unfortunately (or fortunately—I don't know yet), namely the language of abbreviations. There are very few people who still use words; when they |are in business relations, they use the abbreviations for the great [436] corporation, [such] as "G.M.," the auto manufacturer, and I am supposed to know this language, when I speak to someone, but I never was in school to learn it! And it is at least a thousand words which are in common use; and who can know all of them? What to do these words mean? They mean that the word doesn't mean anything any more—the original words of which the combined words are the letters. These original words are not necessary for the technical communication of separated monads, but they are sufficient in order to point to something which, if you have learned it, you know, and no more is needed. The whole realm of connotations, the power of language which lies in the connotations and the history of the words and the rhythms and the combinations, in which all participate, which then are real doors and windows from one to the other: they are taken away, and what is left are signs pointing to something in which cooperation is possible, for instance buying what somebody else wants to sell!

Now this is the second form of individualism, the rational individual who is atomized, goes his way, and where only the doctrine of reestablished harmony, which is lying in God, is able to make understandable that communication is possible at all! When I speak to you—according to this doctrine—it is not me whom you hear, but the movements of sounds which come to you are coordinated to the movements of my thoughts in myself, and my thoughts have no direct causality on the movements, the waves, which hit your ears and then are perceived by you. And even more, what is perceived by your body has no direct influence on what is going on in your central monad, which is your soul; and the only way in which such communication is possible |is a direct interference of God, i.e., a [437] fundamental substance which is the point of unity in all this. When we today speak of atomizing individualism, we usually mean this type.

Then there is a third type of individualism—I called it the Renaissance type, but you can also call it the romantic type, but it has negative connotations, and "Renaissance" does not have too much—except for some theologians! This Renaissance type of individualism has a basis in the philosophy of Nicholas Cusanus, [1] namely the idea that in every individual being, especially in man, the whole universe is mirrored. For this reason, man is called the microcosm in contrast to the macrocosm, but representing the macrocosm and being at the same time a part of it. And since the macrocosm is the self-manifestation of the Divine, is the Divine going over into manifoldness, according to the Renaissance man, every individual becomes the mirror of the divine ground of being himself. As such, the individual represents something unique, but not unique as before God, in *christian* thinking, namely an object of the love of God, but unique in the cultural sense, the representative of unique creative possibilities. This is the *difference* from the rationalconcept also, because it is not the development of *consciousness* which is decisive here, but it is a qualitative character, qualitative elements, which are potentially in every man|and which [438] he is supposed to develop. This is the third type of individualism.

Now if we look at our historical situation, then we can say: Christianity, and in the whole culture which is dependent on Christianity, the religious form of individualism is

[1] Cf. Karl-Hermann Kandler, "Die Einheit von Endlichem und Unendlichem. Zum Verhältnis von Paul Tillich und Nikolaus von Kues." KuD 25, 1979, 106-122. [Noted in his article, "Nikolaus von Kues als Theologe." *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 115, No. 7, July 1990, cols. 481-490, esp. 488, 490n.68.—*P.H. John*

in principle accepted. Even in the French Revolution, or in the period before it, where a noble lady of the hierarchy of the worldly powers asked her minister how her standing before God is, and he shaked his head a little bit because he didn't believe it was too great!—for many reasons. *[little laughter]* Then she said: But God cannot condemn a member of my class to Hell!—Now that was an exception. In [ancient] Egypt and before that, the king (who is God himself) and the aristocracy wouldn't have considered this to be an impossible thing. In this sense the Christian idea of individualism is unconsciously accepted even by every anti-Christian in our culture, except very few who are radical naturalists, and have dropped this idea of *ultimate* relation anyhow.

The second type is the predominant one in this country, the rational individualism: the individual must decide; everybody has to vote; but in order to make him reasonable, he must be educated. And therefore education, as we have discussed in the many lectures on education, is almost the most important act in every democracy—it is certainly in this country.

Then the third belongs to the Continental countries, where the unique individuality of everything is emphasized, not only of every individual man but also of every historical period and every social group. Therefore the longing back to the Middle Ages, where the romantics believed that an individual culture was present, and this culture was not measured by the principles of reason and criticized as primitive or backward over against the progressive powers of Enlightenment, of the individualism of reason.

Then we can say that this last type has been more reduced than the two others; it had been reduced often to an existence—and a very precarious existence—in Bohemianism, while the higher bourgeoisie has accepted, generally speaking, the rational type of individualism, if, as we shall see later, the *whole*concept of the individual in these three senses has not been dropped for the sake of radical collectivism. |Now when you have [439]
these three concepts of the individual, it would be good if you always keep them asunder and don't fall into the many traps and confusions which will immediately follow if you confuse them, if you don't keep them asunder.

I come now to another concept, the concept of person, or personality. The person arises on the basis of the individual human being. There are also legal persons, such as corporations, but we can leave them out for our present considerations and concentrate on person as something— I will say immediately what—which rises on the basis of individual human existence. What is that?

When we discussed morality as one of the functions of man's spiritual life—in the beginning of this section of our lectures—we said morality is the totality of those acts in which an individual person sets itself, or establishes itself, as an individual person. This was the general definition of morality, in order to avoid the distorted form of morality that it is obedience to a set of laws whereby one would ask "Why?" "Where do the laws come from?" "Why do I have to be obedient to them?" If, however, we say that the principle of morality is the principle of the self-establishment of the *persona* as *persona*, then the situation is different; then it isn't estranged law; then it is *we ourselves* who are centrally involved in the acts of morality.

Persona—person: where does it come from? The word has a long history, and it is very important to know it in order especially to avoid pitfalls in the philosophy of religion and calling God "a Person"—which some people still do, in popular nonsense. But if we are clear what persona means, then we would avoid such a thing. | [440]

Persona means the character of the actor in a play—one has derived it from *personare*, which means "sounding through," namely through the mask. *Persona*, and the

Greek*prosopon*, have received the meaning of "mask," of the special character a member of the theatrical cast represents. From there it was applied to the centered self, which we today call a person, which establishes itself in his ethical decisions.

Now in German, person—*Person*—is the *potentiality of self-realization*, in the different forms: religious, rational and romantic. In English, I have been told, the word "personality" is much more used for that. In German the word "personality," means a person which has become actually what it potentially is: a developed *persona*, is a personality, while *persona* is legal [?] a complete [?] thing—one must be treated as a person; therefore if somebody kills me, he will be killed himself—but that doesn't mean that anything is developed; even the murder of a baby, where no person is developed, is a full murder. So German makes a difference between *persona* and personality. "He is a personality" means he *is* something, he has developed his potentialities, he is reasonable, he is impregnated in his being with values and meanings. All this would be the word "personality."

Now may I ask *you*, those of you who feel they can answer it more from their more genuine feeling for the English language than I have it: what is the difference between "person" and "personality" *you* would make?

Student (Susan Lord): It seems to me that you use "personality" in two senses: 1) as opposed |to the German sense, as just sort of something you describe when you describe [441] any person; 2) and the other as an image, in a sense, of a stage or political personality.

PT: That is a third meaning, usually called "character," or something like that. But "character" has a very negative side meaning today: "he is a character" is not always a praising word. This, by the way, I also learned here and didn't know that this word could be used like that. If in German one says *Er ist ein Charakter*, this means he is full of character, you cannot betray him, you cannot put something over him, he can act and speak out of his own impregnation (*Charakter* means impregnation of a coin). A man with no impregnation has empty cheeks on which nothing is written, as sometimes young people have who have not developed very much ... Then this means "character." But I know "character" here means "an extraordinary phenomenon" *[laughter]* which deviates from the normal way of life a *little* bit, but not too much—he is still accepted but he is on the boundary line. *[laughter]*. Now your answer [about] ... political "character": that, I would call political "figure"—he means something for the political scene. That, I would not call personality or character.—Now somebody else?

Student: Don't you think many use person in the sense of the singular of "people; it is not—

Paul Tillich: It is on an individual basis, not yet developed. I mean, a baby is a person, but he is not a personality—that makes it most clear, the difference. Now if this is the case, then I would *like*—how would you say it in English? Would you say a baby is a personality?

Student: His personality is not yet developed. |*PT*: You would say it is an understood [442] personality. *[laughter]*

Student (Roger Johnson): The quality of person that is always related to a particular physical body, and this is one of the reasons why, in the school of personal idealism, they talk not about person so much as about personality, because in personality there is that quality which is not tied to a physical aspect of the person ...

Paul Tillich: So a personality is a ghost in this school—a spirit.

Student: A spirit—not so much a ghost. *[laughter]*

Paul Tillich: Then let us say the English language is in a development here. *[laughter]*

Let us make a decision ourselves, and if you don't mind, since it is comparatively clear, let us simply make the most primitive differentiation, namely person is somebody who can become a personality, but who is not necessarily yet a personality.

Now if you accept this as a preliminary linguistic statement, then we come to the next question: how did it come to pass that this concept of person and personality became of such importance? In Greek thinking the word meant the actor, and it was applied in this form to the Trinitarian figures in God—Father, Son, and the Spirit. But it was never applied to God Himself, and I fight against the application of the word "person" to God. If you say the word "personal God," that, I can accept, because that means God is *also* the ground of everything personal, and therefore He is not *less* than it, but *more* than it! But if you say He is a person, you reduce Him completely. Now this is a footnote.—How did, out of primitive collectivism (to which I come later) the idea and the ideal of personality develop? I think there are two reasons for this. The one reason is the experience of personal guilt—this is the inner-religious Jewish development. And the other is the ability of asking questions—this is the Greek development. And on the basis |of these two characteristics, primitive collectivism went to pieces. Why? In the [443]
first respect, in primitive collectivism, the collective is guilty. And if an individual is singled out for punishment, the primitive mind does *not* believe that this individual is especially guilty—he is not more guilty than the other—but he *represents* the others. The primitive mind *has* these strong forms of mystical identification and participation. Now this participation makes an individual guilty because the *collective* is guilty. And the way of singling him out is done in a magic way, not in the way of finding out whether he was *really* guilty of something. But slowly the divine commandment, especially in Judaism, made the *individual* responsible and not the nation as a whole any more. And after this has happened, we have the responsible, independent individuals who have to carry their guilt, who have to expiate their guilt, and who may be forgiven individually.

Now this took a long time. Even in later periods of Jewish history, the period of the Psalms, for instance, the guilty ego is usually the congregation—the sacred nation—but not an individual within it. But then step by step, especially under the prophetic attack, every individual became responsible for what he has done. It is not so any more—I think Jeremiah says that the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the teeth of the children have become dull, but everybody who does something has to carry the consequences himself. This is one of the most revolutionary statements over against primitive collectivism: *the individual as such* has to take upon himself his own guilt. *He* must answer, he is *re*sponsible, he *ought* to answer, has the duty to answer, for his own being. On this basis the independent person, on an [?] individual basis, could establish himself |and become [444]
a personality.

Then the second source for this movement towards individualism is the possibility of man to ask questions. What does this possibility mean? Why is asking questions the beginning of man's personal development? You know how worried parents are when the children begin to ask questions. And the parents are justified about this, because in the moment in which this happens, the differentiation, the separation in the beginning, *is already a fact*. You cannot ask about that with which you are identical. You can ask only about something which you *do not* have. Having (otherwise you could not ask either) and not having, together: that is the situation of him who asks questions. So if someone asks questions about life as such, about the symbols of the daily life, about the behavior of the rulers of a tribe or a nation, then he is somehow separated, separated to such a degree that he now is a persona for himself and has the possibility of making decisions of his own.

The separation by the guilt, every individual has to carry, and the separation which is implied in asking a question—these two are the two big roots for the development of the individual person. After this separation has been performed, this person elevated itself above that from which it comes—society first of all, but since society is a way in which we deal with nature, nature also. The isolated person starts a process of self-elevation above that where he comes from. Now this self-elevation leads to an ideal, namely to the ideal of personality. This ideal of personality is an invention of the Renaissance, is taken over by Enlightenment, and is supported by Protestantism. It is not only Renaissance, but it is also Protestantism, which has helped to develop the ideal of personality.| [445]

Now let me conclude in brief. We must distinguish two things: the idea, and the ideal, of personality. The idea of person, of personality, is simply the nature of man: man is potentially personality because he is actually person. And this is always and in every period so. Out of this, something else has developed, under the urge of the Protestant form of the relation between man and God, and under the urge of the Renaissance idea of man as microcosmos, namely the *ideal* of personality, the ideal that the meaning of ethical self-realization and ultimately of human life completely and generally, is to become a personality. The consequences of this ideal of personality are developed by me in [these lectures], when I speak about the state of mankind in our period, but I will go into it once more from the point of view of the ideal of personality.

This ideal, in all its greatness, has become one of the most demonic and destructive powers in Western history. And so our next task will be to develop the dialectics of the ideal of personality and relate it to social ethics and the problem of community.