

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF CULTURE NATURE

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Abstract. In this essay I will survey Paul Tillich's views on nature and technology and I will show the primacy of the ontology of encounter in his theology, closely related to his epistemological tools, participation and multidimensional unity of life. Tillich's advice to his contemporaries seemed to be to have a love-affair with everything they encounter or produce while not giving up rationality. I will also consider Tillich's understanding of self-creation of a human being in the moral act, in community with other selves. Lastly, I will assert that Tillich's critique of modernity comes from a non-modern perspective. Thus, since Tillich's theology is relatively free from modern aberrations, it is possible to read his theology as a theology of culture nature (even if for Tillich it remained implicit). The present technocultural and technonatural situation requires this kind of hybridity because otherwise we do not have conceptual devices to think about contemporary culture and nature.

I Paul Tillich's relationship to nature

Paul Tillich's life (1886–1965) spanned a period that saw great upheavals. In his autobiographical writings he recalls how his personal world changed from a reasonably peaceful existence at the high point of bourgeois society with its productive grandeur, to one of conflict and destabilization of the society he belonged to, reflected in the split between Lutheran churches and the proletariat, the rise of Nazism, exile and adjustment to a new world and foreign language, and the transformation of this world into a global village with new technologies offering new means of communication and travel. His life, as he admits, occasioned abandonment and overcoming of various provincialisms – intellectual, theological, and Western. For all his life Tillich stayed unusually attentive to culture, science and technology, and nature. While Tillich's theology of culture is relatively well known, his theology of nature has caught attention only in recent years (E.g. Drummy 2000, also cf Hummel 1994).

With regard to nature, he distinguished a predominantly aesthetic-meditative attitude toward nature from a scientific-analytical or technical-controlling relation. It is theologically formulated in his doctrine of the participation of nature in the process of fall and salvation. He contrasts his view with the Ritschlian theology,

which establishes an infinite gap between nature and personality and gives Jesus the function of liberating one's personal life from bondage of nature within us and beside us. Nature is something to be controlled morally and technically, and only subjective feelings of a more or less sentimental character toward nature are admitted. There is no mystical participation in nature, no understanding that nature is the finite expression of the infinite ground of all things, no vision of the divine-demonic conflict in nature.

Tillich's actual contacts with nature, especially in his younger years, the German poetic literature, and the traditional Lutheran doctrine *finitum capax infiniti* brought him a sense of the infinite potential in every being.

In Tillich's first book of sermons, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, published in 1950, there is a Lenten sermon about "what nature means to us and to itself in the great drama of creation and salvation." One of his biblical texts was Paul's assertion that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth until now" (Romans 8:22) and one of his citations is Schelling's observation that "nature, also, mourns for a lost good" (Tillich 1950:82). In this sermon he poetically praises the glory of nature before turning to its "melancholy," asking: "Why is nature tragic? Who is responsible for the suffering of animals, for the ugliness of death and decay, for the universal dread of death?" In the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich explains more formally that the myth of the fall portrays the transition from essence to existence brought about through the actualization of human freedom. The tragic element is that this exercise of freedom is the result of human destiny rather than simply the result of an individual's acts. The symbol of the serpent and its curse represents the involvement of nature. Any notion of the innocence of nature before the fall is rejected in view of the simultaneous, transhistorical character of the fall and the creation. Nature participates in humanity and humanity in nature, united in a shared destiny (Tillich 1957:42). Greatness of life, greatness and dignity make tragedy possible in all dimensions of life: all beings affirm themselves in their finite power of being. "They do it in their relation to other beings and, in doing so, bring upon themselves the reaction of the logos-determined laws, which push back anything that trespasses the limits given to it" (Tillich 1963a:93). This tragic explains suffering in nature, an explanation which is neither mechanistic nor romantic but realistic in terms of the spontaneous character of life processes. However, consciousness of the tragic, and therefore pure tragedy, is possible only under the dimension of the spirit, that is, by humans. Tragic "describes the universality of man's estrangement and its inescapable character, which nevertheless is a matter of responsibility" (Tillich 1963a:93). It belongs to the ambiguity of greatness and tragedy that the subjects of tragedy are not aware of their situation. Sad events are not tragic events. "The tragic can be understood only on the basis of the understanding of greatness. It expresses the ambiguity of life in the function of self-transcendence, including all dimensions of life but becoming conscious only under the dominance of the dimension of spirit." (Tillich 1963a:94). Tillich intends to establish a public place, a common ground for culture and nature – by placing humans and nonhumans into the same framework of tragedy and greatness.

In his “Nature and Sacrament” (Tillich 1948a:94–112) Tillich argues for a reconnection with earth, water, light, plants, animals and even numbers. He also outlines some more common conceptions of nature: magical-sacramental, rational-objective, vitalistic, symbolic-romantic. All these fail in some crucial way to bridge the dualism of matter and spirit/mind and reality.

II Radical realism and an ontology of encounter

Tillich proposes a “new realism” in which power and meaning are found within physical nature and historical reality, not superimposed upon them. “The power and meaning of nature must be sought within and through its objective physical structures. Power and physical character, meaning and objective structure, are not separated in nature. We cannot accept the word of mathematical science as the last word about nature, although we do not thereby deny that it is the first word” (Tillich 1948a:101–102). Significantly, according to Tillich, “the power of nature must be found in a sphere prior to the cleavage of our world into subjectivity and objectivity. Life originates on a level which is “deeper” than the Cartesian duality of *cogitatio* and *extensio* (“thought” and “extension”)” (Tillich 1948a:102). The apprehension of the inherent powers of nature is not easy, especially for rational discourse. “Everything which is merely object can be approached directly with scientific reasoning and technical tools. That which precedes mere objectivity, needs initiation” (Tillich 1948a:65). Technical reason is not capable of overcoming technological realism in which case the things are subjected to control and use by the rational man. Since the power of being is discovered by thought, the thinking subject in this case may become, intentionally or unintentionally, the bearer of all power. “One concedes to things only so much power as they should have in order to be useful. Reason becomes the means of controlling the world. The really real (*ousia*) of things is their calculable element, that which is determined by natural laws. Anything beyond this level is without interest and not an object of knowledge. This relation to reality is called “realistic” today” (Tillich 1948a:69–70). It is no doubt intellectually more demanding to penetrate into something “nonsubjective” with categories of a subjective mind and into something “nonobjective” with categories of objective reality, while keeping in mind the indirect, symbolic character of terms used for the description of the power and meaning of nature (Tillich 1948a:102). And thus, according to Tillich,

if nature is interpreted in this realistic and, at the same time, historical way, natural objects can become bearers of transcendent power and meaning, they can become sacramental elements... Nature, by being brought into the context of the history of salvation, is liberated from its ambiguity. Its demonic quality is conquered in the new being in Christ. Nature is not the enemy of salvation; it does not have to be controlled in scientific, technical, and moral terms or be deprived of any inherent power, in order to serve the “Kingdom of God,” ... nature is a bearer and an object of salvation” (Tillich 1948a:102–103).

The context of the article “Nature and Sacrament” was the anxiety among the church leaders that the sacraments are “dying,” and the concern that a complete disappearance of the sacramental element would lead to the disappearance of the cult, and finally, to the dissolution of the visible church itself. Tillich’s originality was to approach the problem of sacraments from the side of our ideas about nature. When we lose the connection between the human subject/self and nature/world, then the church ends up in a no-man’s-land, placeless, and replaceable by quasi-religions and ideologies. His goal was to show a way in which Protestantism could reach a more affirmative attitude toward nature. “The lack of such an attitude has greatly contributed to the rise of an anti-Christian naturalism which has not only scientific but even stronger emotional roots: the religious devaluation of nature has been answered by a naturalistic devaluation of religion” (Tillich 1948a:108). Nature does not have to be delegated into ahistorical, isolated, inhuman, objective existence. If nature became distant and separated from humanity for religious and scientific and political reasons, then recognition that natural sciences and our knowledge of nature do not need to be purged of any contamination by subjectivity, politics, or passion – because these are there in spite of ourselves – may liberate non-humans from harmful objectivity and humans from self-imposed isolation and excessive subjectification.

Tillich argues in his essay “Kairos and Logos” (1926) that history, as well as nature, can be genuine objects of knowledge only on the basis of the dynamic concept of truth.¹ “Nature with its forms and laws is always a heavy weight on the scale of thought for a static and against a dynamic epistemology. This is particularly true where nature is under the rule of mathematical form, and therefore is removed almost completely from the decisive character of perception... But to tear apart nature and history and distribute them to two kinds of metaphysics would mean to disrupt genuine elements of reality” (Tillich 1936:162). According to Tillich, individuality in the psychological and sociological sense rests on a natural basis, and this natural basis is inseparably joined with the biological,

¹ Tillich subordinates the question of truth to that of meaning because 1. The question of truth, although capable of the widest ontological connotation, primarily concerns human cognitive encounter with reality and not one’s whole being, nor does it do justice to a human being’s pre-reflexive participation in and intuition of being. 2. He emphasizes the primary ontological sense of intentionality; namely, the given structural bond between self and world. It is within this ontological polarity that the dialectic of concrete existence, in which one discovers the meaning of being that constitutes the truth for man. Because a human being is for Tillich the being who is ultimately concerned about his being and meaning, he places the primary emphasis on the experience of be-ing and the discovery of meaning. He sees the quest for the true, the good and the beautiful as embraced within the quest for the ultimate in being and meaning, that is, the quest for the Holy. In “Kairos and Logos: A Study in the Metaphysics of Knowledge,” of 1926 (Tillich 1936:123–175) Tillich sets out what he regards as the metaphysical foundations of a characteristically Protestant theory of knowledge. He describes the constitutive and regulative principles governing the notion of truth. Among constitutive principles he identifies the concepts of truth, being, fate, history and the personal. Among regulative principles he identifies the concepts of standpoint, attitude, decision, dialectics and the critical Protestant principle that guards against the identification of the absolute with anything finite and contingent.

physical, indeed with the totality of microcosmic and macrocosmic happenings. This, in turn, means that history is not a separate sphere of abstract freedom over or beside nature; rather it is one aspect of events, which at every moment also contain the other aspect: nature and the totality of its relationships. “All history is also nature” (Tillich 1936:163). Tillich argues that the metaphysics of history necessarily drew the metaphysics of nature into new paths. “Into paths which were never strange to the mythical consciousness, but which were neglected for a long time in the interests of rational knowledge and control of nature, although they present themselves most emphatically to the unbiased observation of nature” (Tillich 1936:164). Nature ceased to be a static stage and resource, and the thinking self began to doubt the validity of its self-imposed isolation from the rest of the nature. Ultimately, the natural world contains more meaning than a reduction to pure objectivity reveals. Or from the other perspective, human knowledge is co-constructed in an encounter, participation, and co-constitution of things and humans, both contributing symmetrically.

Tillich’s “new realism” must be described in his own terms, as mystical, dialectical, and self-transcending. There are three affirmations at the base of this view. 1) Reality is a unity of conditioned and unconditioned being. In this respect, mystical realism is most closely related to historical realism which “strives to grasp the power of reality or the really real in a concrete historical situation” (Tillich 1948a:76). 2) Though reality is one, there is an “absolute tension between the conditional and the unconditional” (Tillich 1948:79). 3) The third affirmation basic to Tillich’s realism is that an actual being has the character of becoming, that its character is life and dynamics (Tillich 1951:181, 241f; 1963a:11f). The logical status of this affirmation is analytic, not mystical; in this judgment Tillich agrees with the process philosophers. But the dynamics of being in actuality and the absolute tension between actual being and unconditional being requires that realism be both dialectical and self-transcending.² In this respect Tillich’s theism must be distinguished both from classical theism and naturalism.

His break with classical theism is at the same time a break with its antithesis, naturalism. Equally, he rejects supranaturalism – to regard God as an object is to elevate the conditioned to the unconditional; this corresponds to naturalism’s logically equivalent effort to exclude the unconditional altogether, leaving only the conditioned. In a sense, one could call Tillich’s realism a radical one. John

² According to Tillich, the finite world points beyond itself, in other words, it is self-transcendent. God, in turn, “stands *against* the world, in so far as the world stands against him [sic], and he stands *for* the world, thereby causing it to stand for him. This mutual freedom from each other and for each other is the only meaningful sense in which the “supra” in “supranaturalism” can be used. Only in this sense can we speak of “transcendent” with respect to the relation of God and the world” (Tillich 1957:7). The “self” in “self-transcendent” refers to the observation that the one reality which we encounter is experienced in different dimensions which point to one another. The finitude goes beyond itself in order to return to itself in a new dimension. “In terms of immediate experience it is the encounter with the holy, an encounter which has an ecstatic character... Ecstasy as a state of mind is the exact correlate to self-transcendence as the state of reality” (Tillich 1957:8).

Herman Randall, Jr., has observed that at times Tillich follows Heidegger but at other times, following rather his own insights, Tillich holds that the structure of being is found by human being in his/her encounters with the world, in a polar relationship and cooperation (Randall 1982:188).

Tillich's response to Randall is ambiguous: he says that his analysis of the self-world correlation *is* an analysis of "man in encounter" and that historical events have prevented him from developing a philosophy of encounter (ibid., 342). There can be little doubt that Tillich intended an ontology of encounter; it is less clear that he actually articulated such an ontology. Nevertheless, in an essay of 1955 on "Participation and Knowledge: Problems of an Ontology of Cognition" Tillich did express views which Randall had called "functional realism." Tillich wrote that "the primary phenomenon is the understanding of the situation of encounter in which both oneself and others participate, but not as separated subject and object" (Tillich 1988:70). The event of encounter transforms both oneself and the other.

Tillich is clear that the subject-object distinction is something that has been devised so as not to be overcome under the conditions of existential estrangement: the subject-object structure of reality makes possible asking questions about being. The split between subject and object is the precondition of all knowledge and, at the same time, the negative power in all knowledge. "The whole history of epistemology is a cognitive attempt to bridge this split by showing the ultimate unity of subject and object, either by annihilating one side of the gap for the sake of the other or by establishing a uniting principle which contains both of them. All this was and is being done in order to explain the possibility of knowledge" (Tillich 1963a:70). Tillich's own thinking seeks an ontology and epistemology of encounter. Cognition is an encounter. Subject and object meet in the situation of knowledge (Tillich 1988:66).

Subject and object must be open to each other; they must receive each other to have a cognitive encounter. But knowledge is not only dependent on openness to encounter and participation. It also depends on separation, self-containment, and detachment. It is necessary for the protection of the known. If this were not the case, the structure of what is known would be invaded and destroyed by the dynamics of the knower. "Man can have knowledge because he has a world and is, in this respect, separated from his environment" (Tillich 1988:67). A being that is determined by its environment is not a complete self, and therefore it is incapable of free self-containment, and also of knowledge.

The notion of encounter signals that knowing is an existential engagement between beings of different kinds in a particular situation, and that the meeting of persons with persons will produce a kind of knowledge different from that yielded by the encounter of persons with the rest of the living and inorganic universe. The implications of this realization have profound consequences for Tillich's philosophy, in particular for his account of our knowledge of God. The knower and the known are not agent and patient to one another. The knowing subject is ultimately concerned with one's being and meaning and one's knowledge is an expression of that fact. Knowing is a form of encounter, directed towards union

with the thing known but also involving detachment from it. In echoing the earlier, medieval, realist tradition Tillich is concerned to undermine the nominalist presuppositions of the entire post-Cartesian tradition, and to escape from the charmed magic circle of idealist and essentialist notions on which he and his generation had been raised. Thompson remarks that

*There are, however, elements of exaggeration in Tillich's existentialist account that undermine this realism and bring it dangerously close to subjectivism: in particular, there is the tendency to make the dialectical encounter definitive for the nature of reality as well as for knowledge, and therefore to call in question the existence of a reality independent of thought. Related to this is a tendency, perhaps inherited from the romantic tradition, to make emotion a *conditio sine qua non* for true knowledge (on the analogy, frequently used by Tillich, between *gnosis* and sexual love) (Thompson 1981:123).*

However, a more interesting interpretation might be possible, following Tillich himself: things and people, nature and culture, co-construct and co-constitute each other. More reality has to be taken into account than just the (abstracted) knower and the known, and both are transformed in the encounter. Our involvement with the things we speak about is at once more intimate and much less direct, and the divide between what pertains for example to human activity and history and what to nature and natural history would be bridged. Epistemology and ontology would not remain divided. As far as emotions are concerned, Thompson seems to be thinking that knowledge can be accurate only when it has been purged of any contamination by subjectivity, politics, or passion. Tillich would claim just the opposite: "truth is bound to the situation of the knower" (Tillich 1936:63), and all knowledge has the character of a decision (Tillich 1936:169). Therefore, it is also impossible to form useful universal concepts of cultural ideas. The true nature of religion or art cannot be learned through abstract reasoning. Abstraction destroys what is essential, the concrete forms, and necessarily neglects any future concretizations.

Every universal concept in cultural science is either useless or a normative concept in disguise; it is either an alleged description of something that does not exist or an expression of a standpoint; it is a worthless shell or it is a creative act. A standpoint is expressed by an individual; but if it is more than individual arbitrariness, if it is a creative act, it is also, to a greater or lesser degree, a creative act of the circle in which the individual moves (Tillich 1969:156).

The universality of knowledge or philosophy is limited by its historical and particular "destiny." All things are expressed from some particular standpoint in time, from a particular community of knowing.

Thus knowledge is an encounter, a situation of event with which we can be attuned but with which we never coincide, and which can be frustrated by our own desires or by the desires of the other.³ All knowledge is

³ Scharlemann claims that by "reflecting I ultimately grasp *being* and by doubting I respond to *God*. *Being* is the objectivity of the objectival sphere, and *God* is its subjectivity." *Ibid.*, xi. It seems to imply that God is the hidden subject of all actions, and it would contradict Tillich's insistence on the self-centeredness and freedom of all things.

historical.⁴ Tillich almost alone saw the relativity of given forms of religion and of given forms of culture, even of a scientific, linguistic, technological, and pragmatic culture. For him, the Christian revelation is received in a relative situation and its message always interpreted in and through a particular historical and cultural situation.

Yet he also understood the impossibility of an ultimate relativism (which would be just an absolutism under another name). All thought of any sort, however practical and empirical, depends upon a presupposed stance and a presupposed structure of understanding. For Tillich, we all stand somewhere and must do so. To do so is relative to its time and place. His own attempt to mediate this dilemma of inevitable relativism and yet of an inescapable relation to the unconditioned is, therefore, profound, original, instructive, and possibly fruitful. Tillich could be considered a relativist (or what I would term a radical realist) in Bruno Latour's specific technical sense: as the one who tracks down relations and connections between entities (Latour 1999:310), establishing passage ways and points of contact between his contemporary culture, history, nature, and tradition.

III. Unmentionable others – things, machines and technologies

Much of what is wrong in our world has been laid at the doorstep of what distinguishes the modern world, namely its reliance on science and technology, on the impoverished and limiting technical and controlling reason. Not so Tillich. For Tillich, culture does not refer only to ways in which we express ourselves in religion, narrative myths, language, arts and body language, but it also includes characteristic ways in which people organize their society, and make and use tools. "For man, the technical is something natural, and enslavement to natural primitivism would be unnatural" (Tillich 1963a:74). Tillich did not revert to escapism or utopianism in face of the negativities of modern culture. He did not bracket nature, culture, religion and technology as pure "objects" or "closed systems" so that one would cancel out the other. Technology has transformed our world, and this transformed world is our world, and no other.

... we must incorporate technology into the ultimate meaning of life, fully aware if it is divine, if it is creative, if it is redeeming, likewise it is also demonic, enslaving and destructive. It is ambiguous, as is everything that is. It is not more

⁴ Tillich enumerates three presuppositions of the historical character of knowledge: 1) decisions concerning knowledge are made by historically situated humans; 2) decision is possible only in concrete material, ambiguous world, and this world is also a prerequisite of the decision; 3) meaningful interpretation of reality in which knowledge becomes a spiritual matter. "All knowledge, even the most exact, the most subject to methodical technique, contains fundamental interpretations rooted neither in formal evidence, nor in material probability, but in original views, in basic decisions" (Tillich 1936:143). The decision here refers not to a moral decision but the attitude toward the Unconditioned, an attitude which is freedom and fate at the same time, and out of which action as well as knowledge flows. In the third presupposition, the quality of freedom and fate belonging to knowledge is revealed (Tillich 1936:145).

ambiguous than pure spirit, not more ambiguous than nature, but just as they are (Tillich 1988:60).

Tillich mixed things, complexified relationships, brought together that which lies close in order to have a faithful view of the world. Probably more commonly Christians have been unable to live comfortably with the technological dimension; equally Christians today are certainly unable to live without it. Tillich shifted emphasis away from the external hardware and toward the central significance of our technologies. He uses technology as a mirror, or a lens to bring aspects of our knowledge and values into clarifying focus. He recognized that technology plays an important role in nearly all aspects of culture, including politics.

Technology is either overestimated or underestimated. The ambiguity of technology is veiled both to those who blissfully and blindly trust technology and to those who consider its realization nightmarish. Since the boundaries of technology are defined by what surrounds it, no merely 'neutral' definition is possible.

One form of utopia, the *utopia of overcoming estrangement*, is technological utopia. "Estrangement means first of all the estrangement of man from nature. This is something we all suffer; we have a longing for nature, but we know that nature continues to be alien" (Tillich 1971:159). We do not know what nature is for itself. We are able to analyze it as an object, but its nature is a mystery, and it remains a mystery. "It is estrangement from nature which leads to the hostility of nature – consider the hostility between serpent and man in the paradise myth, which has its beginning in the very moment of temptation; and estrangement is believed to be overcome in two possible ways, through religion and through technology" (Tillich 1971:160). This is the background of the technological utopia, the hope for the miracle.

The possibility of uniting again with nature and of establishing the kingdom of God by technological means broke down after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the faith that human self-realization is advanced through the improvement of every kind of technological product. In Europe, the technological utopia was never as strong an idea as in America; on the other hand, the "reunion with nature" was mainly the concern of poets. "Precisely because we do not know what the essence of nature is, since we are estranged from it, we write poetry about our union with it" (Tillich 1971:161).

For Paul Tillich, technology belongs to "the self-creativity of life under the dimension of spirit," called culture. The term spirit denotes "the unity of life-power and life in meanings, or simply, the unity of power and meaning". Culture refers to that which takes care of something, keeps it alive and makes it grow (Tillich 1963a:57). Living practices change. Sometimes change is forced by external pressures, but often change is generated internally, as standards or approaches, and ways of thinking and feeling are found wanting. Technology plays no small part in both external and internal changes. In technology, as in language, something new is brought into being. Both go beyond the naturally given conditions of existence, language through the creation of universals and technology through the production of tools. "Man produces tools as tools, and for

this the conception of universals is presupposed, i.e. the power of language” (Tillich 1963a:61).⁵

Since technical acting is the adjusting of means to a purpose, it is present as an element wherever purposes are realized, even in the organic evolution of natural forms. Human technology transcends these organic processes, but may be closer to, or farther from them. Tillich (1988) calls those forms which are closest to the natural process “*developmental*” technologies. It is a technology in which “the spirit joins itself to a living gestalt – biological, spiritual, and social – not in order to destroy it and put it in the service of an alien purpose, but, on the contrary, to protect it from destruction, to preserve it, and above all to develop it” (Tillich 1988:53). “*Actualizing technology*”, another grouping in Tillich’s systematics of technology, gives the spirit the possibility of coming into existence, for example in music, science, poetry. That is, here technology is involved in the expression of meaning as well as being. It is a creation and an expression of spirit in the technical function of culture. Along with all cultural creations, here technology points to its religious ground, to the ultimate meaning in being. It is an expression of meaning and value. Technology cannot be accused of destroying the spirit and society. The narrowest and largest grouping of technologies are *transforming* technologies which create structures determined only by purpose. This kind of technology does not unfold; rather it destroys living connections. It is responsible for the creation of the technical era and the technological society.

Technology is ambiguous as is all self-creation of life. Here “it is the object that is to be transformed according to concepts and images, and it is the object which causes the ambiguous character of cultural self-creation” (Tillich 1963a:73). It seems that Tillich is allowing humans to get entangled with artifacts in a reciprocally transforming way. Tillich linked together the liberating power of the word and of the technical act. “But in order to produce tools, one must know and comply with the inner structure of the materials used and their behavior under anticipated conditions. The tool which liberates man also subjects him to the rules of its making” (Tillich 1963a:73).

⁵ According to Tillich, “man has language because he has a world, and he has a world because he has language. And he has both because in the encounter of self with self he experiences the limit which stops him in his unstructured running from one “here and now” to the next and throws him back on himself and enables him to look at the encountered reality as a world. Here lies the common root of morality and culture” (Tillich 1963a:58). Language is fundamental for all cultural functions, whether technical or political, cognitive or aesthetic, ethical or religious. “In order to actualize this omnipresence, language is endlessly variable, both with respect to the particular cultural function in which it appears and with respect to the encounter with the reality which it expresses” (Tillich 1963a:58). Each cultural function has its particular language – not excluding the other but trespassing on it. However, language is ambiguous as all cultural creations, because the subject-object cleavage underlies language. “No language is possible without the subject-object cleavage and ... language is continuously brought to self-defeat by this very cleavage. In theonomy, language is fragmentarily liberated from the bondage to the subject-object scheme” (Tillich 1963a:253). In theonomy, language witnesses, expresses, gives voice to what transcends the subject-object structure. “One of the ways in which this happens is the creation of the symbol” (Tillich 1963a:254).

Tillich enumerates three ambiguities of all technical production. First, “ambiguity of freedom and limitation” in technical production: technical production opens up a road along which no limit can be seen, but it does so through a limited, finite being. The result is predictably both creative and destructive, and awareness of this is expressed both by myths and scientists. The second ambiguity, that of “means and ends” renders concrete the limitlessness of technical freedom by asking: For what? The third ambiguity is that of self and thing. Both the human and the thing are transformed. “He himself becomes a thing among things. His own self loses itself in objects with which he cannot communicate” (Tillich 1963a:74). The human being becomes a part of the technical product and loses one’s character as an independent self. At stake is the definition of humanity. But this ambiguity cannot be overcome by annihilating technical production. The ambiguity of personal participation refers above all to the relationship of person to person, but it also includes the relation of the person to the non-personal (Tillich 1963a:76).

While the danger of thingification is the loss of agency, and thus responsibility, at the same time the things are attributed considerable power and dignity by Tillich. Categorical purity of nature and society, nonhuman and human is unestablished. But things can be endangered as well, things can be deprived of their intrinsic power and become rational economic instruments (Tillich 1971:74). This happens first to movable, tradable goods, but finally to the immovable earth. “There can and must be a *mythos* of technology, and therefore also a cultic consecration of technological production, just as both exist for handicraft” (Tillich 1971:76).

In his *Systematic Theology* Tillich asks: what theonomy could mean in relation to the technical activity, or, more precisely, how the split between subject and object can be overcome in this realm of complete objectification? He thinks that the answer can only be:

By producing objects which can be imbued with subjective qualities; by determining all means toward an ultimate end and, by doing so, limiting man’s unlimited freedom to go beyond the given. Under the impact of the Spiritual Presence ... no thing is merely a thing. It is a bearer of form and meaning and, therefore, a possible object of eros. This is true even of tools, from the most primitive hammer to the most delicate computer. ... The technical object – the only complete “thing” in the universe – is not in essential conflict with theonomy, but it is a strong factor in causing the ambiguities of culture and needs sublimation by eros and art (Tillich 1963a:258).

The destructive side of human technological ingenuity cannot be eliminated by a ban; the only solution is a change in attitude, a change in the will to produce things which are by their very nature ambiguous and structures of destruction (atomic weapons are Tillich’s example). What is needed is a deepening and more complex appreciation of all the facets of our technologically textured mode of life, and technologically acting nature.

IV. Multidimensional unity of life – defining principle for relating the realms of nature and culture

A contemporary theology needs an inclusive, defining principle to provide a basis for relating the realms of nature and culture/history, the human as well as the natural environment. For this reason a theologian must travel everywhere, must do his/her fieldwork. A theologian of culture/nature describes relationships; s/he is “in the middle” where possibilities are boundless. If the present order looks like a chaos, then quite naturally the present nature of knowledge seems chaotic. The concepts like “becoming” or “process” are useful in their clarity but Tillich finds that these are not adequately expressive. A rage for living, for becoming, for growth and going out of oneself, is not enough: the first function of life is self-integration according to Tillich. In self-integration “the center of self-identity is established, drawn into self-alteration and re-established with the contents of that into which it has been altered. There is self-centeredness in every process of self-integration” (Tillich 1963a:30). The process of actualization of life does not imply only the function of self-integration; it implies also the function of producing new centers, the function of self-creation. The third function of life, self-transcendence, occurs when life strives beyond itself as finite life. Tillich summarizes his discussion of the three functions of life within the process of actualization of the potential,

self-integration under the principle of centeredness, self-creation under the principle of growth, and self-transcendence under the principle of sublimity. The basic structure of self-identity and self-alteration is effective in each, and each is dependent on the basic polarities of being: self-integration on the polarity of individualization and participation, self-creation on the polarity of dynamics and form, self-transcendence on the polarity of freedom and destiny. And the structure of self-identity and self-alteration is rooted in the basic ontological self-world correlation (Tillich 1963a:32).

The notion of the “multidimensional unity of life” enables us to conceive of the inorganic and the organic as aspects of a larger reality with multiple interconnections. (Tillich 1963a:12ff.) “Life” refers roughly to what scientists call “nature”(Cf also Cruz 1997). All potential entities which can become actual can be destroyed: existence is a matter of being and nonbeing, life and death, or growth and decay. The inorganic is not to be relegated to the secondary role as implied by philosophies of life, and perhaps especially by traditional histories in which intrinsic value is ascribed to humans, but not to their habitats that sustain them.⁶

⁶ Michel Serres remarks that in modern history writing, “the adversaries most often fight to death in an abstract space, where they struggle alone, without marsh or river. Take away the world around the battles, keep only conflicts or debates, thick with humanity and purified of things, and you obtain stage theater, most of our narratives and philosophies, history, and all of social science: the interesting spectacle they call cultural. Does anyone ever say *where* the master and slave fight it out? Our culture abhors the world. Yet quicksand is swallowing the duelists; the river is threatening the fighter: earth, waters, and climate, the mute world, the voiceless things once placed as a décor surrounding the usual spectacles, all those things that never interested anyone, from now on thrust themselves brutally and without warning into our schemes and maneuvers. They burst in on our culture, which had never formed anything but a local, vague, and cosmetic idea of them: nature.” (Serres 1995:3).

Sustaining life in the universe brings the animate and the inanimate into a larger unity of purpose and understanding. The principle of the multidimensional unity of life also prevents the inorganic realm from being described in exclusively quantitative terms.

Gilkey recalls Tillich saying,

Personally and actually each of us lives [this] unity, just as a culture as a whole lives its unity as long as it lives. But we cannot now express this unity in language, and so we cannot think it; soon we will hardly be able to feel it. Unity at some level is necessary for the being of any organism, of a person, and of a cultural community – none, no level, can bear to live through the incoherence of falling apart (Gilkey 1990: 26).

Tillich writes that although the religious significance of the inorganic is immense, it is rarely considered by theology (Tillich 1963a:18). He continues that the quantitatively overwhelming realm of the inorganic has had a strong anti-religious impact on many people in the ancient and modern worlds.⁷ Thus a “theology of the inorganic is lacking.” In the dimensions of life, the inorganic has preferred position insofar as it is the first condition for the actualization of every other dimension. All others would dissolve were the basic condition provided by the constellation of inorganic structures to disappear (Tillich 1963a:19). With regard to relation between the inorganic and the organic, Tillich emphasizes that the dimension of the organic is potentially present in the inorganic, even though its actual appearance depends on conditions that biology and biochemistry seek to describe. Potentially, self-awareness is present in every dimension but it appears only under the dimension of animal being. Along with inner awareness, another dimension becomes possible, that of the personal-communal, or the “spirit.” Spirit as a dimension of life, as the power of life, includes not only mind and reason but also awareness, perception, intention, eros, passion, imagination. Without logos, however, spirit could not express anything. So far as we know, this has occurred only in human beings; the term spirit therefore designates “the particularly human dimension of life” (Tillich 1963a:21).

For Tillich nature is the dimension through which history, the last and all-embracing dimension of life, arises; actualization of a dimension of life is a historical event within the history of the universe. The dimensions of history are present in realms of life other than human, but in an anticipatory way. Even in the inorganic, and certainly in the organic realm, there is *telos*, an “inner aim” which is quasi-historical. History is the realm in which we raise and seek to answer the question of the meaning of life, in which we wonder about life’s import and confirm what we value. While we may not share all the same values, we share historicity. The specific characteristic of historical life is the creation of the new; history is the realm of intentional change and agency.

⁷ But cf Robert John Russell’s Tillichian theological analysis of twentieth-century theoretical science and its empirical discoveries, including Big Bang, inflationary, and quantum cosmologies and much else in Russell 2001.

Human beings as bearers of the spirit are open to the Spirit of God. But in order to be present to the human spirit, the Spirit of God must be present in all the dimensions, which are actualized in human beings, and this means in all the dimensions of the universe. Because of the multidimensional unity of life, all dimensions, as they are effective in human life, participate in the Spirit of God.

The hope of fulfillment of all life is considered in the symbol of the Kingdom of God.⁸ It is a kingdom not only of human beings but also involves the fulfillment of life under all dimensions. The kingdom is the non-fragmentary, total and complete conquest of the ambiguities of life – and this under all dimensions of life, or, to use another metaphor, in all degrees of being. Nothing is ultimately excluded. This “New Being,” under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, is but fragmentarily⁹ realized in history, under the conditions of existence, as an expectation.

Tillich considers it essential to speak of God and nature together: “If God has nothing to do with nature, he finally has nothing to do with our total being.” Whatever we know in any realm bears witness to its creative ground. When nature is removed from theology, God gradually disappears to us because we ourselves are nature. Since science deals with “the logos of being, the inner structure of reality, ... the witness of science is witness to God” (Tillich 1967:126, 162).

In the second volume of *Systematic Theology* Tillich writes that since “man reaches into nature, as nature reaches into man,” nature shows analogies to human good and evil doing. “This makes it possible and necessary to use the term ‘fallen world’ and to apply the concept of existence (in contrast to essence) to the universe as well as to man” (Tillich 1957:43). Indeed, “man cannot claim that the infinite has entered the finite to overcome its existential estrangement in mankind alone,” for the function of Jesus as the Christ “is not only to save individuals and to transform man’s historical existence but to renew the universe” (Tillich 1957:95). This is so because the “interdependence of everything with everything else in the totality of being includes a participation of nature in history and demands a participation of the universe in salvation” (Tillich 1957:96). “The Christ is God-for-us! But God is not only for us, he is for everything created” (Tillich 1957:100).

⁸ “Kingdom” is a political term; by this the importance of the political in the dynamics of history is affirmed.

⁹ Tillich distinguishes between the ambiguous and the fragmentary. “Since mankind is never left alone by God, since it is continuously under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, there is always New Being in history. There is always participation in the transcendent union of unambiguous life. But this participation is fragmentary.” New Being points to something unambiguous, however, it is fragmentary in its manifestations in time and space. The fulfilled transcendent union is an eschatological concept. The fragment is an anticipation. “The New Being is fragmentarily and anticipatorily present, but in so far as it is present it is so unambiguously.” The distinction between the ambiguous and the fragmentary makes it possible for us “to give full affirmation and full commitment to the manifestations of the Spiritual Presence while remaining aware of the fact that in the very acts of affirmation and commitment the ambiguity of life reappears. Awareness of this situation is the decisive criterion for religious maturity” (Tillich 1963a:140).

For Tillich nature is not only glorious, it is also tragic. Tillich opposes an “automatic harmony” of the bourgeois dream, but affirms the common creative ground, that is God, both to humans and nature. Both nature and a human being participate in each other, and both also participate in the expectation of a new theonomy. Nature and humanity are not simply “one,” as the principle of unity would have it, but in their manifoldness are interdependent, and in their separate being, are dependent upon the ground of being itself. Under theonomy, nature will enhance being, will overcome its alienation from God and humanity. But in existence, this fulfillment will always be fragmentary and temporal.

Through “the multidimensional unity of life,” Tillich places humanity in dependence on nature and its evolving processes while insisting on the distinctiveness of human history. The insistence that we live in existential estrangement, in a fallen world, binds humanity and nature in both a tragic condition and an ultimate expectation. In the notion of a “new being,” Tillich suggests how attitudes may be guided not only for the “healing of the nations” but for the “healing of nature” itself.

Yet nature, too, has a history. Its processes of growth both preserve what is sustainable and open themselves to novelty. As in human history, phenomena in nature are best understood in terms of their context, interconnectedness and evolving change.

The fundamental notion of encountering reality in terms of a multi-dimensional unity of life provides an understanding of both human identification with and distinction from nature. Human history is grounded in nature, dependent on it for its life. At the same time, the human reach is beyond the natural to its questions of meaning and value. “The view that these are dimensions of the one life-reality enables us to comprehend the historical aspect of the natural and the natural character of the historical, while pointing toward the spiritual as the instigator of those questions of meaning and value. Nature is then the origin of history and history the fulfillment of nature” (Wettstein 1998:96).

Just as in the encounter the subjects and the objects lose their purity, in the multi-dimensional unity of life there are mediations, mediators, messengers, transcodings, and transitions. Tillich subverts in the complexity of his analyses the distinctions and hierarchies most common to the Western thinking. He does make distinctions: essence and existence, nature and culture, etc. – but these are all provisional, and characteristics of finite being under the conditions of existence. Tillich’s method of correlation is a clue as to what it means to enlist philosophy and the social and natural sciences in a task that is theological even when these sciences are not themselves theological, and may have only disdain for religion. Tillich never steps out of the finitude and he shows the world within which “there is the seriousness of those who seek to experience the ultimate in being and meaning through every cultural form and task” (Tillich 1963a:161). The ultimate concern gives meaning to the notions of participation and encounter; it heightens the stakes.

The existential situation of Tillich’s time called for an interpersonal ethical imperative. The environmental situation of our own time requires a more

comprehensively defined imperative: to lead a meaningful life in a community of meaningful life (human and non-human others). The moral challenge is to view the “multidimensionality” of life from the standpoint of the Other and with love, whether natural object or process or person, and to discover, acknowledge and maintain value in a nature that is glorious as well as tragic.

In the vision of Revelation 22:2 the new Jerusalem comes from heaven to earth as a bride to a husband. It speaks of “the river of the water of life,” the “tree of life” with its many fruits and its leaves “for the healing of the nations.” The participation of nature in the eschaton is no afterthought. The more comprehensive view of Christian faith concerning the creation, fall and redemption of the world is not that nature is included in the story of human redemption but that humanity is a participant, albeit a determining one, in the redemption of nature.

Nature, then, does not provide the sub-structure or a stage for human history; rather God’s history with humankind is a segment of God’s history with nature. The demonic use and using up of nature (concupiscence) bespeaks a deep alienation of human being from itself, from nature, and from its own infinite ground; consequently, it seeks that infinity of meaning, and so seeks itself and its unity, through taking the infinite into itself, by possessing and using the finite infinitely. Tillich, reinterpreting concupiscence in non-Freudian manner, has given it a much wider meaning as the prime symptom of the estrangement of human being from the whole world of goods and so of nature – and as the key “sin” of our technical, commercial culture. Christian faith affirms that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ estrangement, presenting itself as anthropocentrism (it is the original sin), is conquered, is no longer the defining factor of the human reality. In a Tillichean manner, anthropocentricity is our destiny and our biological nature unless or until we realize another possibility; and yet it is our fault. But the victory must be proclaimed and lived if the world is to believe it. Although, when human beings unilaterally proclaim their extraordinariness, who in the world is listening anyway? The realization that the fulfillment of nature is the fulfillment of history and vice versa arises in moments of agape relation to the Other. For that the whole creation groans; in that the whole creation is celebrated.

V. Towards a theology of culture nature

A theologian of culture is involved in an activity which may easily evoke resentment both of the more kerygmatically inclined theologians, and the representatives of respective cultural areas who may feel intruded by the theologian. Mediation, to go between, to translate, to carry across, to let other be through oneself – after all, it is the need, and it is the burden – and we do it all the time. Certainly it demands a modicum of self-knowledge, a certain candor as well as inwardness with oneself. Theology is a hybrid form of knowledge, resting on Scripture and tradition on the one hand, and on ontology and ethics on the other. Within the framework of an ontology (for ontology precedes epistemology), scientific theories and data have

entrance into theology. For Tillich, humanity is universally, necessarily, and incorrigibly religious. Efforts to remove the traces of religion should not imagine the possibility of the removal of religion itself. Faith is irrefutable, like evil, hunger, pain. In the light of Tillich's location of religion in the essential nature of humanity, projects to end religion in principle as envisioned by certain streams of Enlightenment rationalism or forms of twentieth-century atheism or secularism go beyond naïve to the dangerous. They fail to see what Tillich saw clearly: when religion is negated as religion, it returns in non-religious, often political form, to wreak an equal or even greater harm on the truncated humanity that turns something into deity in the secular disguise of "quasi-religions." Looking upon religion as human resource rather than threat, Tillich gives to religion a dignity and necessity.

Tillich's concern was not simply human history and culture. He enlarged the context of theological discourse on salvation by bringing nature into conversation. Almost forty years ago Tillich spoke in a sermon ("Man and Earth") about new questions which become matters of life and death for people. The raising of such questions in historic moments, he said, "has changed man's view of himself in all respects, as it has changed the understanding of the Christian tradition on all levels." He continues,

It may well be that we are living in such a moment, and that man's relation to the earth and the universe will, for a long time, become the point of primary concern for sensitive and thoughtful people (Tillich 1963:68f).

Not only does Tillich prophetically identify the issue of our time but he provides in his theology a number of notions which can help us, with some modification, to think about nature, ourselves and our future.

Tillich was well aware that there is a crisis in the relations of a scientific and technical culture to nature. The creator of technoculture – technical reason – that can make "objects" out of the human beings it sought to know, categorize, and manipulate presents political and social dangers. In this capacity technical reason not only does not know its object, but destroys the very object it seeks to know. The same with the knowledge of nature – a merely instrumental knowledge of nature, and so a merely manipulative use of it, also fails in the end to understand it and culminates by destroying it – and in destroying nature, it destroys us. Nature is misunderstood as merely an object over against us, as are we, its knowers, if we understand ourselves as merely objective knowers and manipulators of its forces.

I think the time has come for a theology that would keep together both nature and culture simultaneously. The theology of nature is different than the doctrine of creation (or of providence, for that matter). The theology of nature represents a refocusing, a continuation, and at the same time, a restriction and transformation of the doctrine of creation. On the one hand, both the theology of culture and the theology of nature can be seen as siblings, born of a common parentage of creation and providence. On the other hand, the theology of nature as well as the theology of culture, in its emergent forms, receive their urgency from the contemporary situation – the ecological failure of traditional anthropocentric ethics, the modern imprisonment of the subject in the mind, the postmodern imprisonment of the

subject in language – all have contributed to the growing unease with our predominant models for thinking about the reality and ourselves. In short, it is a practical and an ethical crisis that most dramatically indicates the need to re-envision nature and culture interactions. First there are methodological considerations. What is the nature, what is technology, what is culture that the theologians of nature and culture theologize about, and scientists are studying? What kind of linguistic and cognitive status does the concept of nature have? What alternative understandings of nature are available to us in our culture? Secondly, there are theological considerations: What kinds of models of divine transcendence and immanence (the world-God relationship) are available to the theology of nature? How is Jesus the Christ related to the nature, to human existential situation, etc.? Tillich's theology could be counted as a theology of culture/nature for both cultural and natural are kept in near balance both theologically and methodologically by his extensive use of all available sources at his time. Tillich's own analyses dealt with an amazing variety of areas of culture: art, economic, social and political life, psychology, law and morals, science and technology. If we add to his picture of the world situation the messy realities of contemporary technonature – which we have to if we want to survive – the result is so novel and complex that most of our basic assumptions (about life and death, space and time, natural and artificial, global and local, etc.) come into question. If technoscience has revealed to us the world (both microworld and macroworld) which, while perceptually identified, could not be experienced except through mediations of instruments (image technologies, virtual reality and other communication technologies), then we need and actually have a very different kind of relations both with nature, technology, and ourselves. It's about networks, relays and relations and not about an isolated mind-in-the-vat (Bruno Latour's designation) which only secondarily comes into contact with everything else.

Tillich calls forth genuine possibilities of commitment, without irony, sterility or coercion. If many contemporary critics press for politicization of criticism and science, Tillich's concern was rather: Is there a space where politics becomes transformed into something else even if it must translate back into itself?¹⁰

¹⁰ Tillich writes, "The political realm is always predominant because it is constitutive of historical existence. Within this frame, social, economic, cultural, and religious developments have an equal right to consideration. In some periods, more – and in other periods, less – emphasis can be given any one of them. ... But if the cultural or religious historian crosses the political boundaries he is aware that this is an abstraction from actual life, and he does not forget that the *political* unities, whether large or small, remain the conditions of all cultural life. The primacy of political history cannot be disregarded, either for the sake of an independent intellectual history demanded by idealistic historians or for the sake of a determining economic history demanded by materialistic historians. ... It is significant that the symbol in which the Bible expresses the meaning of history is political: "Kingdom of God," and not "Life of the Spirit" or "economic abundance." The element of centeredness which characterizes the political realm makes it an adequate symbol for the ultimate aim of history." Tillich 1963a:311.

According to Tillich, the first frontier of Christian action today is to show how the “structure of objectification” (transforming life and person partly into a thing, partly into a calculating machine)

penetrates all realms of life and all spiritual functions. It must show especially how even the religious symbols have been misinterpreted as statements about facts and events within the whole of objectivity, thus losing their inborn power to transcend this realm of the subjective-objective and to mediate visions of that level of reality in which life and personality are rooted (Tillich 1988:136).

Christian action must be daring in its analysis of the human situation generally and the present cultural and religious situation especially. It must have courage to join the rebellion of life against internal repression and external suppression – in spite of the risk of chaos. But it must show also that it comes from a place of withdrawal where it has received a criterion and a power able to overcome the danger of losing the person while attempting to save her/him. So religion’s task in technoculture is to function as variously articulated everyday practices of resistance and productions of other possibilities in hegemonized situations. It demands knowledge and ingenuity to catch the moments of possibility (*kairoi*), and creativity for the forms of resistance.

Looking from another perspective, humans have always been simultaneously archaic, modern, and futuristic, and so are nonhumans and things. For a modernist, time and everything in it passes, falls behind us, becomes obsolete. For a non-modernist like Tillich, things stand in the proximity, regardless of their distance in the linear timeline, and different time-frames of different dimensions intermingle and meet in their fulfillment. Traditional symbol to express the fulfillment of history has been “Eternal Life.”

Reality is not independent of our explanations and explorations; a non-modern and religious approach is a half-forgotten way to familiarize ourselves with the middle ground, with the hybrids which are not merely human nor non-human, natural or artificial, merely passive or only active, only mythical and textual, or simply technological.

Tillich’s theology of culture and nature articulates a genuinely religious vision of the world, and unlike modern liberal theologies or fundamentalists, without taking an antiscientific, antitechnological, antirational stance. On the contrary, Tillich challenged his contemporary science and philosophy in the name of a more rational, better description of reality because it was to be achieved by the theonomous ontological reason, instead of the modern form of technical, quantitative, problem-solving reason. Tillich’s radical realism, the self-world correlation, and insistence on historicity, situatedness of all knowledge requires restoration of ethics, aesthetics and passion to the realm of cognitive discourse.

Tillich rejects both the mechanistic idea of nature and the organicist idea of “automatic harmony” in culture and nature. Instead he proposes an ontology and epistemology of encounter in which the subject-object relationship is transformed. He rejects also various dualisms, and his multidimensional unity of life acts as a unifying principle. At the same time the polarity of individuation and participation

protects the integrity of the known, and the integrity of the dimensions. Intrinsic value is attributed to all “selves” comprising nature (and in nature there are no things).

Tillich’s theology is philosophical in terms of self-consistency, adequacy to the relevant facts and resources, and illuminating power both regarding the traditional theological vocabulary and contemporary cultural situation. Yet Tillich’s worldview is specifically Christian, it does not come from “nowhere.” He does not have an impartial, self-effacing, universal perspective but he necessarily and firmly knows where he is standing. He does not abstain from making normative claims appropriate to the Christian tradition: Jesus the Christ is the center of history, and the norm for Christian existence and proclamation. Tillich’s critique of modernity is effective and enthusiastic but he does not claim to overcome the errors of modernity by returning to imaginary premodernity. He is offensive for the modern sensibilities because he is standing elsewhere, in a non-modern world where unity of culture and nature is thinkable.

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