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Paul Tillich's analysis of the existential condition of man and its implications for social casework theory and practice

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PAUL TILLICH’S ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTENTIAL CONDITION OF MAN
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CASEWORK
THEORY AND PRACTICE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Florence

with tender affection and abiding love
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General psychological theories constitute the social caseworker's most important conceptual tools. The caseworker's effectiveness in both diagnosis and treatment will always be affected by the basic body of theory to which he subscribes. It is, therefore, important that the social caseworker, if he is to be effective in practice, think as clearly and as consistently as possible in the area of theory.

It is this investigator's impression that the social work profession is not as aware of its own theoretical assumptions as both thinking and effective practice require. Schools of social work are often characterized as "psychoanalytically oriented," "behavioristically oriented," or sociologically oriented." In an earlier period schools of social work were often divided in "Freudian" and "Rankian." More often actual casework practice reflects an eclecticism which combines fragments from all these theoretical orientations. There can be no objection to this per se. Different frames of reference may illuminate different facets of man's total human situation; but the history of all disciplines strongly suggests that if serious confusion is to be avoided eclecticism must ultimately give way to a more general and adequate theory which is both internally consistent and coherent with the rest of human knowledge. It seems to this investigator that the present state of social work theory
often leaves the social work graduate in the precarious position of having to diagnose and treat the human individual without a clear and consistent view of what a human individual is. The most urgent present need of all the helping professions is a defensible view of man in his totality.

It is this investigator's opinion that social work education itself is not fully aware of many of the intellectual currents which have already begun to permeate and reshape social work theory. Much of what is now standard casework theory, accepted by all trained social workers, is neither psychoanalytical, behavioristic, nor sociological. Nor do the categories of "Freudian" and "Rankian" have relevance. It is the author's belief that presently the most far-reaching influence being exerted upon casework theory and practice flows from the broad intellectual stream known as "phenomenology" or "existentialism." Such basic and fundamental social work concepts as the client's right of self-determination, the importance of viewing the client subjectively or from the inside, the current emphasis upon the client's powers of choice and his capacity for assuming responsibility for his own life, even the concept of "anxiety" as now used by most caseworkers, are neither Freudian nor behavioristic in origin or meaning. In fact, none of these concepts, all of which are essential to effective casework practice, could have possibly had their origin in either behavioristic or psychoanalytically-oriented psychologies. These are concepts which have been introduced into the field of social work from the general movement of existentialism. Whether these influences are desirable or otherwise -- and this investigator believes they are entirely desirable -- it is important
that social work recognize what is happening to its own theoretical foundations. Carl Rogers, for example, who continues to exert a tremendous influence upon both social casework and psychotherapy, makes little use of a Freudian frame of reference.\(^1\) Rogers, who is an existentialist or phenomenologist, is a severe and consistent critic of both psychoanalytic and behavioristic psychologies. Yet many social caseworkers who continue to see themselves as "psychoanalytically oriented" also pride themselves in being thoroughgoing Rogerians.\(^2\)

What is required in the face of the present lack of clarity in casework theory is a philosophical view of man which is both empirical in the sense of being in touch with man's actual human situation and also sufficiently general to pull together existing theory fragments into a coherent and consistent whole. What is needed is a view of the human individual in his totality. This may be a task which philosophy and not psychology itself must perform.

In the following pages we have sought to present the basic philosophical thought of one outstanding modern existential thinker, Paul Tillich. We believe a careful reading of Tillich's thought as set forth in this thesis will demonstrate two facts of vital importance to all who are actively engaged in social casework practice. First, existentialism

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\(^2\)For further discussion of the relationship between Freudian Psychology and Phenomenology see also Carl Rogers, "Person or Science? A Philosophical Question," *American Psychology*, X (December 1955), 267-278.
has vast and far-reaching theoretical and practical implications for the social caseworker from the standpoint of personality, theory, diagnosis, treatment techniques, and also from the standpoint of a defensible theory of values. Tillich offers us the opportunity to pull together a multitude of disparate fragments into a dynamic whole. Secondly, in examining Tillich's thought carefully the reader will become aware that through a process of osmosis social casework in both theory and practice has already become much more existentialist than it is either Freudian, Rankian, or behavioristic; and while social casework would err seriously if it discarded Freud, it would be equally foolish for social casework to continue to ignore the relevance and present influence of thinkers like Sartre, Heidegger, Husserl, Kiekegaard, Buber, and Tillich. Our profession is being profoundly influenced by these thinkers whether we choose to recognize this fact or not.

A brief word about the method used in preparing this study. One cannot possibly understand existentialism or any one representative of the existentialist movement without seeing his subject in the light of the total context of Western culture. Existentialism is a broad movement which cuts across the whole of Western culture. In many ways it is as hard to define as concepts like the "Renaissance," the "Age of Reason," or the "Medieval Spirit." There are no easy or simple definitions of "Existentialism." An examination of the bibliography will suggest that the author's own preparatory reading ranges from the general to the particular. Much of this reading, while valuable for other reasons, proved to be irrelevant to the task at hand. In order to give the thesis any focus at all it was necessary to choose one
existentialist thinker with the question in mind, "What does this thinker have to say to social casework?" The conclusions drawn, while based upon Tillich's thought, are my own.
CHAPTER II
THE HEIDEGGERAN BACKGROUND OF TILLICH'S ANALYSIS
OF THE EXISTENTIAL CONDITION OF MAN

The appropriate point at which to begin an exposition of Tillich's existentialism is certain core ideas which Tillich derives from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger who, along with Jean-Paul Sartre, is regarded as the leader of Twentieth Century existentialist philosophy.¹

Heidegger's philosophy begins with a question: At what point does man's condition as man manifest itself most clearly and poignantly? As the individual's awareness of his human condition grows and deepens, what one constant, pervasive factor in his life threatens to render his existence meaningless? The answer, in abstract terms, is the individual's awareness of his finitude in an infinite universe. This, when experienced at the deeper subjective level of one's personal existence, means the dread of death and the fear of personal extinction. This fear, anxiety, or dread, is heightened, multiplied, and rendered infinitely more acute by the fact that man is the being who by definition is possessed of self-consciousness. Through his own thought, imagination, and projection he can anticipate the endless time that stretches beyond death.

¹An excellent summary of the core ideas which Tillich derives from Heidegger may be found in E. Weigert, "Existentialism and Its Relation to Psychiatry," Psychiatry, XII (September 1949), 399-412.
He projects himself into an endless past in which he was not and also envisages an endless future in which he will no longer be.

This anxiety, which is inherent in our self-conscious existence, may not arise in its more acute forms in those who have an unquestioning faith in an all-wise, beneficent Providence. But when traditional religious forms begin to weaken, or disintegrate entirely, the individual may suddenly be confronted with his true existential condition in all its stark reality. No longer shielded from his true existential plight by socially validated religious systems or institutionalized illusions the individual, naked and alone, now faces the inescapable fact of his own ultimate nonbeing.

Heidegger, true to the traditions of German speculative philosophy, employs such metaphysical categories as "Being," "Nonbeing," "finitude," "ontological participation," etc.; but Heidegger insists that if these traditional philosophical concepts are to have meaning, they must be understood and experienced "existentially." For man there is but one certainty: death. All growth in human self-awareness leads to a consciousness of this fact, which is universal, inescapable, and unalterable for all finite human existence. For Heidegger the core of all authentic selfhood consists in calmly recognizing this fact and becoming at home with it. Only when the individual lives through this poignant experience of self-discovery and accepts the fact that he can expect

1For a discussion of Heidegger's existentialism as a possible basis for a religious metaphysics see W. A. Kaufmann, Existentialism From Dostoevsky To Sartre (New York: Meridian, 1956), pp. 201-221.
nothing from the universe is he able to grasp the otherwise obscure nature of "Being" and "Nonbeing." "Being" is not a metaphysical category by which we cognitively lay hold of the universe's objective reality. "Being" is what we ourselves affirm in our struggle against "Nonbeing." Only as we have the courage to see the human situation as it really is do we begin to take "being," or reality, into our own life and thus fulfill our vocation as man.

It follows for Heidegger that anything which prevents man from recognizing and accepting his true existential condition thereby thwarts his fullest self-actualization as man. If man is to come into his own, all illusions and deceptions must be relentlessly stripped away. If the individual is to pass from inauthentic to authentic selfhood he must differentiate himself from the social mass whose function is to blind the individual to his true condition. While these institutionalized deceptions may allay the individual's existential anxiety, they also keep him from achieving his fullest self-awareness as a self-conscious being. If the individual is to be free, if he is to become a genuine person, if he is to achieve his highest degree of self-actualization as man, he must learn to live in the light of the one existential fact which is inherent in all human awareness, namely, the consciousness of the constant threat of death and nonbeing.

The fact that we know we are going to die does not, for Heidegger, mean that we have faced the fact of death existentially. The surface mind may accept death as an abstraction without experiencing it subjectively at its own deeper levels. This is particularly true of individuals who remain tradition-oriented. Cultural systems and life-long
psychological conditioning may stifle the individual's full awareness of his true existential condition. But for Heidegger, any failure to make peace with death and nonbeing, any turning away from the pain of one's ultimate personal extinction is always at the cost of human awareness. Man thereby falsefies himself and his universe; his self-actualization as man is stifled and distorted; his growth and maturity as a person is arrested; and his selfhood remains restricted, uncertain and unreal.

In short, for Heidegger, man as man can never come into his own unless he first faces the void of his own nothingness, looks unblinkingly at the abyss of his own ultimate nonbeing, and renounces all claims upon the universe. It is against this general Heideggeran background that we now turn to a more detailed consideration of the existentialism of Paul Tillich.
CHAPTER III

TILLICH'S ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTENTIAL CONDITION OF MAN

For Tillich, as for Heidegger, anxiety lies at the core of all conscious finite existence. It is inherent in self-consciousness because it is intrinsic to man's existential condition. "Anxiety" as the existentialists use the term is not synonymous with "anxiety" in its psychoanalytical meaning. For Tillich "anxiety" is existential anxiety. As Freud uses the term, "anxiety" is "neurotic anxiety" or "pathological anxiety." But for Tillich, as we shall see in a later section, all anxiety -- normal, pathological, and neurotic -- are states of existential anxiety existing under special conditions. This is an important distinction and its implications will be fully developed later. For the present we turn to a consideration of the nature of existential anxiety and the several forms which it may take.

1. The Anxiety of Fate And Death. Tillich's anxiety of fate and death is essentially the same as Heidegger's dread of death, but for Tillich the dread of death contains the element of fate as well as death. By "fate" Tillich means forces in the individual's life which are contingent and unpredictable. The individual has no control over them; and as far as he is humanly able to ascertain, they are meaningless, senseless, and unnecessary. Yet the individual is, everywhere and at every moment of his existence, completely at fate's mercy. Fate, which is
always the relative threat, generates a basic, pervasive, and ineradicable anxiety because in the background of fate always stands the absolute threat, namely, death. Because the individual is always at the mercy of fate, and because death is always potentially present in fate, the fear of death becomes not only a factor in the last moment of one's personal existence, it is also a decisive factor of consciousness in every moment of man's being within existence. The threat of death existed for all men at all times. Hence the anxiety of fate and death is present in every moment of self-conscious existence even when an immediate threat of death is absent.1

2. The Anxiety of Emptiness and Meaninglessness. We have now to consider what is implied in man's existence as a human person; and, given this definition of the human person, what kinds of things constitute a threat to its existence. Self-actualization of a person cannot be conceived after the analogy of the spontaneous unfolding of other organic forms. The self-affirmation of one's personal being is not like the unfolding of a flower, nor is it like the growth of one's body. Because man is a self-conscious being, self-affirmation is always in terms of meanings. Man is creatively human only to the extent that he understands and shapes reality. For man self-actualization is not the blind activism which releases purposeless vitality. Man has goals, values, purposes. Man is a being who does what he does for reasons which may or may not be "valid" or "true" but which must always be reasonably acceptable to him.

He is continuously in process of evaluating and judging what he has done by values which he has chosen. He requires, precisely because he is human, an answer to the meaning of his existence. The absence of meanings, and a personal commitment to these meanings, is a threat to the whole being of the person as a person. Tillich says that the individual, if self-affirmation is to be possible, must have ultimate concerns. By "ultimate concerns" Tillich means generalized meanings which give meaning to all meaning.

When the individual lacks value commitments, there is nothing to elicit from him a creative response at its deeper levels, and his very being as a person is threatened at its center in one of two ways: namely, by the anxiety of emptiness, which is the relative threat, or by meaninglessness, which is the absolute threat. In either case the individual experiences existential anxiety because in terms of all that makes him human his existence is threatened. As a person he experiences himself as impoverished, diminished, thwarted. This for Tillich is the psychological counterpart of Heidegger's dread of death and nothingness.

The existential anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness reflect a basic paradox which is inherent in the human situation. Doubt is an essential element in all higher forms of man's self-affirmation: science, government, social reform, change and progress, the creative arts, etc. Doubt is an absolutely necessary ingredient in each stage of the individual's expanding, growing self-awareness. It is the essence of his being as man. But when doubt becomes total, it becomes a threat to man's self-affirmation. For Tillich, emptiness and meaninglessness are the characteristic forms of existential anxiety in our age. Relative freedom
from it is possible only in stable and static cultures.¹

3. The Anxiety of Guilt and Condemnation. But man, says Tillich, is threatened from a third side. Man's being, whose nature is to actualize itself, is not only given him but also demanded of him. Whether he finds viable meanings through which he can affirm his life or not, he is nevertheless responsible for his life. He is required to answer, if he is asked, what he has made of himself. He who asks him is his judge, namely, he himself, who at the same time stands over against him. This too, says Tillich, is inherent in the existential situation. I am responsible for what I make, or fail to make, of myself; and I am responsible to myself.

For Tillich man is "finite freedom." This is not the freedom of indeterminancy but the freedom to determine oneself through decisions at the center of one's being. This freedom, says Tillich, is always within the contingencies of finitude. Within these limits man is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become, namely, a human being whose potentialities as a human being are fully actualized. Man is always under his own categorical imperative to fulfill his destiny as man. In every act of moral choice he contributes to the actualization of what he potentially is.

This produces an existential anxiety which in relative terms is the existential anxiety of guilt and in its absolute terms is the existential anxiety of self-rejection and condemnation. Man cannot accept

¹Ibid., pp. 46-51.
his being passively. He is always under the moral imperative of doing something with it, and this in turn always requires values and meanings.

By way of summary Tillich has said there are three ways of viewing existential anxiety. Existential anxiety may manifest itself in the form of fate and death, emptiness and meaninglessness, guilt and condemnation. These three forms of experiencing one's existential condition are always interrelated in the individual's concrete human situation. Says Tillich:

The anxiety of the one type is immanent in the anxiety of the other types ... the threat of fate and death has always awakened and increased the consciousness of guilt. The threat of moral nonbeing was experienced in and through the threat of ontic nonbeing. The contingencies of fate received moral interpretation. Fate executes the negative moral judgment by attacking and perhaps destroying the ontic foundations of the morally rejected personality. The two forms of anxiety provoke and augment each other. In the same way spiritual and moral nonbeing are interdependent. Obedience to the moral norm, i.e., to one's own essential being excludes emptiness and meaninglessness in their radical forms ... while the disintegration of the moral conscience is an almost inevitable basis for the attack of spiritual nonbeing. On the other hand, existential doubt can undermine moral self-affirmation by throwing into the abyss of skepticism not only every moral principle but the meaning of moral self-affirmation as such. In this case the doubt is felt as guilt while at the same time guilt is undermined by doubt.¹

The three types of anxiety are interwoven because their underlying unity is existential. They are inherent in the human situation. They cannot be argued away, nor can they be removed by psychiatry, psychotherapy, or social casework. They can only be accepted through what Tillich calls the "Courage of despair."

¹Ibid., p. 54.
The Condition of Existential Despair

The above analysis has brought us to a point which can be summarized as follows: awareness of one's true existential condition produces existential anxiety, and existential anxiety finds its fulfillment in despair. Despair is implicit in the human situation. It is, in fact, the only appropriate human response to the human situation. We have now to ask, what is despair and what does it imply for the human enterprise?

The meaning of despair, says Tillich, is "without hope." When one has reached the condition of despair, no way out into the future opens to him. In despair there is no way out. In despair, says Tillich, we experience nonbeing and meaninglessness, absurdity and senselessness, as absolutely victorious in our lives. At this point the self which is aware of its despair wants to blot out the self which is aware. The self wants to get rid of the self but cannot. Why? Because if anxiety were only the anxiety of fate and death, voluntary death, or suicide, would be the way out of despair. But despair is also the despair of guilt and condemnation. Man, even in his despair, is still the being who is required to answer, if he is asked, what he has made of himself; and he who asks him, namely, himself, is still his judge. Suicide can liberate from the anxiety of fate and death, but it cannot liberate from the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. Man's ultimate absurdity is that the senselessness of his existence renders impossible even an appropriate response to his condition of despair. He cannot take the step which would eliminate the self which experiences the anguish of despair. The greater becomes the desire to do away with the self the greater still
becomes the self's awareness of the futility of the solution. This, says Tillich, is what makes despair so desperately desperate. There is, in Sartre's words, "No Exit."¹

This brings us to a crucial point in Tillich's analysis. If despair is the point to which all developing finite awareness ultimately leads, and if this point is marked "No Exit," precisely what recourse is there? Tillich says that fortunately despair is a "boundary line." We cannot go beyond it. When we have faced it there is nothing more to face. Since we cannot go beyond despair is there anything which can be done with despair? Tillich says that if there is an answer to the problem of existential despair it must be found within the existential situation itself and not outside it. A religious leap of faith to a point outside the existential situation will not do.² Existential despair must yield its own answer. The problem of doubt and meaninglessness must be resolved existentially or it cannot be resolved at all. Only this kind of answer will meet the needs of modern man.

For Tillich there is only one possible answer: every radical negation contains an implicit affirmation. The act of accepting meaninglessness is itself a profoundly meaningful act. The experience of despair implies heightened human sensibilities, an expanded and deepened human awareness. The facing and acceptance of this despair involves a degree of intelligence, courage, and integrity which are themselves the very

²The current American theological interest in the implications of this position may be traced in Thomas J. Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and The Death of God (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril Co, 1966).
highest forms of self-affirmation. In the experience of despair the individual is already sensitized too, and has taken into himself, vast ranges of truth and reality. This is what Tillich means by the "Courage of despair" or "The courage To Be" in the face of despair. It is, paradoxically, through despair that man achieves his destiny as man. Through the anxiety of death and meaninglessness the inauthentic self gains authenticity, and meaninglessness becomes meaningful. It is not a question of whether life has meaning. This is life's meaning! It is the meaning which the authentic person requires, namely, that I shall be able to accept the gift of life and affirm it.

Self-Affirmation and the God Above God

For Tillich the individual's self-affirmation in the face of life's apparent meaninglessness is itself an act of faith. But it is important to understand what Tillich means by this. For Tillich "absolute faith," which enables the individual to choose self-affirmation as the only alternative to despair, is without rational content. It is not a cognitive act which embraces rational or creedal propositions about anything. The self simply stands upon the brink of an ultimate despair and decides that it is better to "be" than "not to be." It is as though the self said, "Anything is better than despair. I will accept and affirm myself, with or without a rationale for so doing." When this is done the self achieves a degree of reality and meaningfulness which validates the act of absolute faith.

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\[1\] Tillich, op. cit., pp. 140-142.
For Tillich the fact that we can do this, and the fact that notwithstanding the meaninglessness of existence most people do manage to do it, implies certain presuppositions about "Being," or the Universe, itself. The individual can affirm his being in spite of his being totally unable to find defensible reasons for doing so only because the individual participates in universal being whose nature is itself an eternal process of becoming. In the final analysis, man's self-affirmation is possible only because of a source of self-actualization outside himself. The individual, whether he is aware of it or not, is a part of the creativity which is the cosmic process itself.¹

Tillich is careful to state, however, that from the standpoint of the individual the existential situation is not affected one way or the other by its implied ontology. Through "absolute faith" the individual can affirm his being whether he believes this self-affirmation is sustained by an outside source or not. Says Tillich:

Man may not necessarily be aware of this source. In situations of cynicism and indifference he is not aware of it. But it works in him as long as he maintains the courage to take his anxiety upon himself. In the act of the courage to be, the power of being is effective in us, whether we recognize it or not. Every act of courage is a manifestation of the ground of being, however questionable the content of the act may be. The content may hide or distort true being, the courage in it reveals true being. Not arguments but the courage to be reveals the true nature of being-itself. By affirming our being we participate in the self-affirmation of being itself. There are no valid arguments for the existence of God, but there are acts of courage in which we affirm the power of being, whether we know it or not.²

¹For a full statement of Tillich's views on Christian Theology the reader is referred to Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology 3 Vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63).

²Tillich, The Courage To Be, p. 181.
We have seen that for Tillich absolute faith is without special rational content, but this does not mean that it is without any content whatever. The content of absolute faith, for Tillich, is the "God Who Is Above God." All arguments for the existence of God fail to convince because the God whose existence the arguments would prove is meaningless. For Tillich "God" is a "limit notion." All that can be said about God is that he is the "Ground of Being." This is nothing more nor less than the boundless sea of mystery which surrounds and sustains all known and knowable reality. It is the reservoir of all unactualized possibility. It is not an entity existing among other entities. Like the Mystic's "Absolute" we stand before it in mute silence. The "Ground of Being," or the "God Above God," is the ultimate mystery of all existence, and it is beyond all human knowing. Yet to the degree that an individual finds the courage to affirm his being as man, God, or the Ground of Being, is as real in the life of the irreligious scientist as in the creative love of the religious saint. Both scientist and saint, atheist and mystic, are participants in the universal process of creativity whose ultimate source is the "Ground of Being" or the "God Above God."

It is against this background that we gain added insight into what Tillich means by "Absolute Faith." As the Ground of Being is not a definable entity among other entities, so absolute faith is not a state of mind existing among other states of mind. Absolute faith is never something separate and definite, nor is it a state which can be isolated and described. Tillich says it is always a movement in, with, and under other states of mind. This faith is without a name, a church, a cult, or a theology; but it moves in the depths of all of them. It is the
power of being in which these things participate and of which they are fragmentary expressions. One does not come into this dimension of faith though catechizing or theologizing or through rationally articulated doctrines or creeds. One comes to it through existential anxiety. In the face of life's emptiness and meaninglessness, when traditional symbols have lost their power, absolute faith awakens in one the courage to affirm his being even when all the inherited concepts of "God," "Immortality" and "Providence" are no longer believable. Even in the face of total doubt absolute faith gives us the courage to say "yes" to being.

For Tillich this is as far as faith can go, and it is as far as it needs to go. Says Tillich:

The courage to take the anxiety of meaninglessness upon oneself is the boundary line up to which the courage to be can go. Beyond it is mere nonbeing. Within it all forms of courage are reestablished in the power of God who is above the God of theism. The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt. (Italics Tillich's).

\[1\] Ibid., p. 190.
CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATION FOR SOCIAL CASEWORK THEORY AND PRACTICE

We have before us Tillich's analysis of man's existential condition. We must ask, what does this analysis imply for social casework theory and practice? Our thesis is that Tillich's philosophical position has implications for the following areas of social casework: (1) psychological theory, (2) diagnosis, (3) treatment, which three implications require and make possible, and (4) general value theory. We will now develop each implication in turn.

Implications For Personality Theory

Tillich's criticism of existing psychological theories can best be understood against the background of his philosophical phenomenology.¹ For Tillich, as for all phenomenologists, the one basic certainty is the self's subjectivity. It is with this certainty that all knowledge must begin. To fail to understand this is to fail to understand either existentialism or the doubt and meaninglessness of our age. For the existentialist all "objective" and "scientific" certainties crumble before the self's powers of critical analysis. The nuclear physicist holds, for example, that "real" and "hard" things like molecular

¹For a concise explanation of the concept of "Phenomenology" and the relation of Phenomenology to the general existential movement see M. Merleau-Ponty, "What Is Phenomenology?", Cross Currents, VI (April 1956), 59-70.
structures, once presumed to be fundamental "stuff" out of which the material world itself was made, are simply convenient constructs of the mind with no more objective reality than mathematical symbols. For critical epistemology the self can never leap the chasm which separates subject from object. What "reality" is in terms of Kant's Ding-in-sich is both unknown and unknowable. When doubt becomes total, as it has for the modern mind, the only certainty which cannot be questioned without contradiction is the existence of the self which doubts. For Tillich, as for Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, this is the meaning of Descartes' Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore, I am), although for Tillich there is much more to sum than cogito. Any recovery of certainty, or any reconstruction of meaning, therefore, must begin at this point, namely, with a subjective self which looks out upon a world whose ultimate nature it cannot know. This is what all existentialists mean by the primacy and transcendence of the self.

We now ask, what for Tillich is the nature of this subjective self whose subjectivity constitutes man's only certainty in an age of doubt and meaninglessness? The distinguishing characteristic of man is his self-consciousness. This reality, which is all the self can know with immediate certainty, cannot be explained in terms of anything less than itself. It is like nothing else the self can imagine or conjecture. In self-consciousness the self experiences itself as both subject and object, judge and judged. It sees itself both as it is and as it might be. It is limited by time and space, and yet it is limited by neither. In the fact of self-consciousness, says Tillich, nature has taken a "leap," and ordinary scientific methods cannot cope with what this leap has
brought into being.¹

For Tillich all scientific, objective psychologies violate the human person as we know him. Scientific psychologies, in order to be "objective," must view persons as objects. This not only violates the "object" which it purports to understand. It assumes that we know what "objects" are when in actuality all we know is subjects. It explains the known in terms of the unknown. The human person in his innermost nature is a unique, subjective being. Any meticulous measuring of his universal, objective qualities, therefore, tells us little about the man himself. The man who is known to objective psychology is always a distorted, truncated man.² For Tillich, as for all existentialists, objective behavioristic psychology represents the ultimate perversion of the human individual and the ultimate depersonalization and dehumanization of man.

For Tillich a defensible theory of personality must include both the self's centeredness and its existential wholeness. Tillich finds psychoanalytically oriented theories more feasible than scientific behavioristic theories, but he insists that the basic insights of the psychoanalytical movement add up to a consistent and coherent theory of personality only if these insights are viewed in a broader existential context. To describe a person as an ego-id-superego system, with each part battling for domination of the individual's personal center, violates


²For a critical appraisal of the underlying and often unquestioned presuppositions of science itself see Reinhold Niebuhr, "Limitations of the Scientific Method: and Answer to Pierr Auger," Bulletin of Atomic Science, XI (Fall 1955), 87.
both the centeredness and the wholeness essential to a defensible concept of a person. A person, even in a relatively advanced stage of pathological disintegration, is more than a sorted collection of pieces. The id, ego, and superego are not desperate parts of the self. The self experiences each as profoundly its own. Psychoanalytical concepts like "repression," "projection," "rationalization," etc., become intelligible only when viewed as expressions of a centered self. Repression, for example, is not an automatic mechanism which operates apart from me. I repress materials in my conscious mind because I want them repressed; and, at a deeper level of consciousness, I know I want them repressed; and, at a still deeper level, I actually experience myself as the agent which represses them.

But for Tillich this points up a still more decisive question: why, and under what circumstances, do I feel compelled to repress vital areas of my life and being? Repressed desires, urges, and wishes, says Tillich, are the self's unactualized potentialities. Tillich asks, why do we seek through repression to blot out dimensions of our personal being? Because we cannot face the existential situation and the anxiety inherent in that situation. All neurosis, as we shall see, is the self's maneuver to affirm its reality on a limited scale through the diminishing of the self. The self, unable or unwilling to tolerate the anxiety of its existential condition blocks off important sectors of the self in order to affirm what is left of the self.

By way of summary, Tillich finds current personality theories acceptable only when reinterpreted in the light of man's total existential condition. For him the self must be recognized as both centered
and whole. Man is a unique and subjective being for whom freedom, choice, decision, and responsibility are real. He can be understood only when he is approached and accepted in his existential wholeness because in the reality which is the "person" the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Because in his essence man is subject and not object we gain insight into him only when we relate to him as a subjective being. For Tillich the contributions of the psychoanalytical movement are rich and vast, but to the extent that psychoanalytical theories are abstractions from the wholeness of living persons they, like the behavioristic theories, contribute to the dehumanization of man.

Implications for Casework Diagnosis

Tillich's refocusing of accepted personality theories inevitably involves a corresponding reappraisal of accepted approaches in the area of diagnosis and treatment. Freud held, for example, that anxiety is the core of all psychopathology; but unfortunately, said Freud, no satisfactory theory of anxiety exists. Earlier Freud had said that anxiety is the reemergence of repressed libido. Later he held to that anxiety is not the effect of repression but its cause. For Freud this lack of a consistent theory of anxiety, which affects both diagnosis and treatment, was a major failing of the psychoanalytical movement.¹

For Tillich this confusion in the area of basic psychological theory stems from a failure to see the human person as a centered self

possessed of existential wholeness. All existing theories have one thing in common: anxiety is seen as the awareness of unresolved conflict between the structural elements of personality. These conflicts may be between unconscious drives and repressed norms, between different drives struggling for the domination of the personality's center, between an urge toward greatness and the individual's experience of smallness and insignificance, between the need to be accepted and the fear that one is not accepted, etc., but for all these theories anxiety is the result of a conflict between the personality's structural parts.

But for Tillich this ignores the most basic, most universal, and most inescapable of all human experiences, namely, the individual's existential condition. The human individual does not become anxious because of a lack of harmony in the functioning of his internal parts. Unless something much more important is at stake why should the individual's internal harmony matter? An individual becomes anxious because the whole of his being as a person is threatened. Inner conflicts become relevant only when they threaten the centeredness and existential wholeness of the person. What is always at stake is the self in its existential totality.

What Tillich means by this can be illustrated by Freud's classical story of Little Hans. What we have is a child's phobia involving the following elements: a child, parents, horses, penises, infantile sexuality, an unresolved oedipal, and various defense mechanisms. But

1Ibid., pp. 75-85.

we cannot say that Han's phobia, or the anxiety which precipitated the phobia, is caused by any of these factors or by any combination of them. None of these factors would be intelligible unless a more basic condition existed first, namely, a self which experiences itself as threatened in the whole of its being. Unresolved Oedipals, repressed sexuality, penis symbols, castration fears, etc., are meaningful only insofar as they are parts of a larger dynamic whole in which a human person is threatened in his totality. Only as we see Han's phobic reaction as a pathological adjustment to what has become for him an existential crisis does the complex and involved psychoanalytical terminology used to describe his case have meaning. Only on this basis can a causal sequence of events be established. This is what Tillich means when he says that all neurotic anxiety is a state of existential anxiety under special conditions.

This brings us to a consideration of the difference between existential and neurotic anxiety. We have seen that implicit in man's existential condition is an ultimate despair. The only alternative to despair is self-affirmation. But, says Tillich, there is one other alternative. The individual who can neither accept despair nor affirm his being in the face of this despair may avoid both by escaping into neurosis. The neurotic avoids despair by affirming himself on a limited scale. Self-affirmation is not lacking, says Tillich, but the self which is affirmed is a reduced one. The neurotic affirms that which is less than his essential or potential being. He blocks off through repression significant sectors of himself in order to actualize what is left.
Of the neurosis itself, Tillich says:

This is, so as to speak, the castle to which he has retired and which he defends with all the means of psychological resistance against attack, be it from the side of reality or from the side of the analyst. And this resistance is not without some instinctive wisdom... The danger is either that he will fall back into another and much better defended neurosis or that with the breakdown of his limited self-affirmation he will fall into unlimited despair.¹

The neurotic adjustment pits the neurotic against reality and reality against the neurotic. The ensuing conflict generates its own special kind of anxiety in addition to the individual's existential anxiety, namely the neurotic anxiety of having to maintain the neurotic defense system against reality. But both the neurotic defenses and the resulting neurotic anxiety are brought into play by a more basic anxiety, namely, existential anxiety.

For Tillich the distinction between neurotic and existential anxiety not only brings needed clarity to psychological theory; it also makes available a practical and useful diagnostic tool. At the core of all psychopathology there is one common, unvarying factor, namely, an existentially threatened self. It does not matter how complex, multiple, or bizaar the symptoms, as long as the personality distortion is functional and not organic in origin, the underlying causal factor is always one and the same, namely, a person whose existence as a person is threatened.

It would seem that if the above theory of anxiety is valid, the principle involved would be as diagnostically applicable to one type of emotional distortion as another regardless of place, time, or social

¹Tillich, The Courage To Be, p. 68
milieu. We believe this to be the case. Erick Fromm's "market-oriented" people, Rollo May's "Hollow Men," and David Reissman's "other-directed" personalities, for example, are not "neurotics" or "hysterics" in the Freudian sense. Nor are they socially "maladjusted" people. These are the Twentieth Century's "Empty People" for whom doubt, meaninglessness, and existential despair takes the form of actually experiencing themselves as non-persons. Their effort to actualize themselves through "other-directedness" involves a loss of autonomy essential to their self-affirmation as persons. Their flight into the "Lonely Crowd" is as much an expression of existential despair as Freud's classical neurotics.

The significance of this analysis in the diagnosis of any and all emotional pathologies would seem to be clear. Since for Tillich, all anxiety is basically existential anxiety, and since existential anxiety is basic, universal, and inescapable, the pertinent diagnostic question in any and all emotional distortions would seem to be, "At what point, and in what ways, is this particular individual's existence as a human being, being threatened?"

Implications For Casework Treatment

For Tillich the goals of all treatment, whether in psychotherapy, social casework, or pastoral counseling, is to help the individual avoid neurotic or pathological adjustments to existential anxiety and achieve fuller self-actualization through the acceptance of his existential condition.

As a philosophical generalization this is true, but the actual treatment of the neurotically disturbed cannot be this simple. We have
said that it is only through meanings, or values, that the individual is able to achieve and maintain normal human functioning. The obverse of this is also true; it is only through meanings and values that the neurotically ill can be restored to normal functioning. Emotional illness always involves both emotional conflict and a basic confusion in the individual's values, meanings, and life purposes. The patient's neurotic illness is usually equated with his inner emotional conflicts, but this is only because it is his inner conflicts, and not his confusion of values and life purposes, which the individual experiences with pain and immediacy. The absence of values, meanings, and life purposes, which creates both the emotional conflicts and the individual's illness, may never become apparent to either the individual or the therapist who works with him. But this does not mean that values and meanings are not crucial. Basic to all emotional pathology is the problem of values and meanings.

The effective treatment of the neurotically disturbed, says Tillich, will always involve two interdependent, interacting factors. There is first the problem of resolving, through specialized psychotherapeutic techniques, the patient's already-formed neurosis. The patient must be led to see that his pathological adjustment prevents his self-actualization and that through the neurotic anxiety which the pathological adjustment creates he is not escaping from but adding to the anxiety inherent in his life situation. This, Tillich says, cannot be done by philosophy. It can only be done by qualified persons trained in the psychological skills. But once the patient has worked through his
neurosis there will remain for him the problem of meaningfulness. It was precisely the absence of meaning in the patient's life which led him into his neurotic adjustment. Unless he can be helped to find viable meanings and values through which he can affirm himself, says Tillich, he will almost certainly fall back into another and better defended neurosis; or with the breakdown of his limited self-affirmation he will fall into a limitless despair.

This brings Tillich's analysis to its most crucial point. Where, in an age of doubt and meaninglessness, are these needed values to be found? On what foundation, in an age of relativities, is a standard of value to be erected? For the generation which has witnessed the "Death of God," and in a Universe which couldn't care less, what ultimate criterion of value is possible? For modern man value norms cannot be handed down from on high. This is precisely the underlying source of modern man's problem. For modern man there is no "On High." All he knows, or ever will know, is his present existential condition.

Implications for A Theory of Value

Because for Tillich values and meanings are absolutely decisive for man's self-actualization we must now ask, What does Tillich mean by "values" and what does he mean by "meanings?"

We have seen that for Heidegger the purpose of all culture is to conceal from man his true existential condition and that man never comes

Footnote 1: For a sharper distinction between the respective roles of the philosopher and the psychotherapist in the treatment of the mentally ill see Paul Tillich, "Anxiety, Religion, and Medicine," Pastoral Psychology, III (April, 1952), 11-17.
into his own until he relentlessly strips away all illusions and looks at his human situation for what it really is. Tillich agrees that the function of all culture is to make possible man's self-affirmation in the face of his existential despair, but he insists that we must be very clear about what this implies. For Tillich all values and meanings are mediated to the individual through "systems of meaning." It is only through these "systems of meaning" that man's existential condition becomes tolerable. The anxiety of fate and death, for example, produces in the individual what might be called a normal, or non-pathological, striving for security. The individual knows that there is no absolute and final security. He may also know that life often demands the courage to sacrifice some or even all security for the sake of a fuller self-affirmation. But most human energies, individual and collective, are focused upon one overriding human concern, namely, to reduce, avoid, deny, or delay the power of fate and death. Ultimately man does not succeed in this undertaking; but by resisting fate and death, by struggling against it collectively and individually, postponing it, and building institutionalized defenses against it, man manages to actualize his being as man. He not only creates and sustains societies, cultures and civilizations, but as an individual he becomes a socialized being and thereby actualizes his highest human potentialities as an individual. Similarly, as man grows in total awareness, he finds it increasingly difficult to discover rational grounds for believing his existence has any meaning. This basic fear of an ultimate meaninglessness in his life is made tolerable to him only through finite systems of meaning which he himself creates: religions, science, philosophy,
art forms, ideologies, etc. Only this creative response to his existential plight makes possible man's affirmation of meaning in the face of an ultimate cosmic meaninglessness.

But what we are dealing with in "systems of meaning," says Tillich, is the individual's relationship to socially inherited culture forms. The individual escapes an ultimate despair only by being born into a relatively stable culture which offers him meanings and values already established and validated by the authority of tradition. But what, asks Tillich, happens when all systems of meaning, and the societies which sustain them, are themselves threatened with meaninglessness? The answer is the universal breakdown in meaning. The individual then stands, alone and defenseless, against naked despair. For Tillich this is precisely what has happened to large segments of mankind in an age of rapid social change. Modern man no longer finds traditional institutionalized responses to existential despair credible. Values and meanings which in more stable periods of history saved him from an ultimate despair and made possible his self-affirmation are no longer possible for him.

For Tillich there is only one possible answer to the crucial question of value: the values and meanings which we seek must be found in the structure of man himself. For Tillich structure is inherent in all being: personality, or the human self, is no exception. Man's self-actualization, like the self-actualization of anything else in a dynamic, evolving universe, takes place in and through structures. The fact that we are persons, and not something else, implies structural limitations inherent in personality itself.
Of man's basic nature Tillich says,

He is given to himself as what he is. He has received his being and with it the structure of his being, including the structure of finite freedom. Man can affirm himself only if he affirms not an empty shell, a mere possibility, but the structure of being in which he finds himself.... Finite freedom has a definite structure, and if the self tries to trespass on this structure it ends in the loss of itself.... This is true of the cynic. He cannot escape the forces of his self which may drive him into a complete loss of the freedom that he wants to preserve.¹

For Tillich the philosophical doctrine of the "relativity of values" is valid only within the limits imposed by the structure inherent in man. The individual's self-actualization, regardless of his cultural orientation, always occurs within the context of an existential condition common to all men everywhere. All value systems, all systems of meaning, all culture forms, all societies, reflect at least one universal element: their purpose is to make possible, under whatever conditions may exist in a particular time and place, the self-actualization of the human beings who are involved. From the standpoint of any given cultural frame of reference, some value systems will always seem to us more true and others less true; but their basic purpose is identical, namely, the actualization of human potentialities. The ultimate and universal value implicit in all cultures is the self-actualization of persons, not the changing, shifting, and often conflicting social forms through which this takes place. Cultures and value systems are always relative; but we have to ask, relative to what? The answer is, relative to the development of the human beings involved. For Tillich this is

¹Paul Tillich, "Being and Love," Pastoral Psychology, XLIII(December, 1954), 46.
the "meaning which gives meaning to all meaning." The self-actualization of man's own inherent human potentials is a universal moral imperative which man imposes upon himself precisely because he is man.¹

The cultural anthropologist who insists that all values are relative does so with reservations. What he means is, "Do not interfere with the sexual taboos and religious beliefs of these primitive people. It is only through these taboos and beliefs that they achieve self-affirmation as human beings." The implied absolute to which the anthropologist appeals is that every human being, because he is a human being, has the right of self-actualization through whatever meanings and value systems may be possible for him. Similarly, many Western value judgments may be false and destructive; but value judgments like "the value of the individual," "the inherent worth of persons," "the dignity of man," etc., cannot be equated with any particular culture or with any particular society because they define the universal conditions for the self-actualization of man as man.²

¹For Sartre "Existence precedes essence," or "Until we affirm our existence we have no essence." For Tillich this is unacceptable. Man's essence, for Tillich, is his own inherent structure as man. See Mary Warnock, The Philosophy of Sartre (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), pp. 110-134.

²The view that the validity of certain basic value judgements have to be assumed, with or without rational justification, if the social worker's existence is to be justified, and if he is to function at all, is interestingly presented by Henry Miller, "Value Dilemmas in Social Casework," Social Work Journal, XIII (January, 1968), 27.
This brings us to a final question: granted that the universal goal of all finite existence is self-actualization, what precisely does this mean for the social worker who, like his client, is caught in the doubt, emptiness, and meaninglessness of his age? What does this universal goal, or value, mean in terms of its application to concrete problems confronting the social worker? For the social worker, and for social work philosophy, Tillich's philosophy of value would seem to have the following implications:

1. It is an interpretation of value which saves the social worker himself from the ultimate meaninglessness which characterizes our society and which so often afflicts the client with whom the worker is called upon to work. A thoroughgoing ethical relativism will always leave the social worker without clearly defined professional goals. For Tillich this is unacceptable. If the helping professions are not to contribute to the meaninglessness and despair of our age there must be for both worker and client goals which are clear and positive. For Tillich this is possible without the sacrifice of the worker's intellectual honesty. The professional worker's goal, under any and all circumstances, is the client's fullest possible self-actualization as a human being. This goal is neither relative nor arbitrary. It is, as
we have seen, rooted in the structure of man as man. This does not offer the worker a detailed guideline as to what he should do in any particular case, but it does define the general direction in which both worker and client must move.

2. Tillich's interpretation of values makes possible and necessary a broader focus in the one-to-one relationship. The casework relationship must always include the worker's awareness of both the client's psychological processes and the client's functioning value system and the bearing which each of these factors has upon the other. Relevant to this broader focus are such questions as the following: Where does the client currently stand in his relationship to the value norms of his culture? Are his inherited systems of meaning, as for example, his basic religious beliefs, sufficiently intact to make his self-affirmation possible? Or must the worker explore with the client the possibility of new values and new meanings? If so, what new value orientations are acceptable to the client? Given the client's total life situation, what life purposes are for him believable? If the client's basic attitude toward life is one of existential despair, is the worker himself sufficiently mature and aware as a person to convey to the client what Tillich calls the "Courage of despair?" Increasingly the caseworker may find it necessary, if he is to meet the deepest needs in his client, to assume in addition to his traditional role of caseworker also the role of a philosopher of values and even that of interpreter of life's ultimate meanings.

3. Tillich's philosophy of value also defines the social worker's responsibility to the whole of the client's social and cultural milieu.
If self-actualization of the individual is possible only through socially sustained systems of meaning the worker's responsibility to his client will always include whatever alterations in society may be required for the creation of these systems of meaning. Radical social change is implicit in Tillich's concept of the self-actualization of the person.

4. Tillich's philosophy of value also has something to say about the social worker's total awareness as a person. The easy assumption that we often fail to establish rapport with our clients because of a difference in class orientations may be only a rationalization at best. The barrier which separates us may be a difference in total human awareness. In his estrangement from us the client may be saying, "I know the meaning of existential despair, but do you? How can you, with your neat and pat answers, empathize with me on a level of awareness of which you know nothing?" If existential despair is the fundamental problem for an increasing number of social work clients, can we relate to these clients creatively on any basis which does not assume an equally significant experience of life in the worker also? Heidegger reminds us that it is only as we pass through the poignant experience of our own existential self-discovery, and feel the full impact of our own personal existence, that we pass from inauthentic selfhood into authentic selfhood.¹ Whether the client, whose basic problem is despair, can find the courage to affirm himself in the face of despair, will depend upon how much authenticity he senses in us. Otherwise the client senses that we are expecting something from him which we have not required of ourselves.

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