
TOWARD A CORRELATION OF SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

PAUL TILlich'S CORRELATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE SCIENCE-THEOLOGY DIALOGUE

Daekyung Jung*

*Myongji University, Faculty of Liberal Arts, 50-3 Namgajwadong, Seodaemungu, Seoul 03674,
Republic of Korea*

(Received 4 November 2016, revised 31 March 2017)

Abstract

An interaction between Natural science and Theology is necessary? My answer is yes. If the given reality is God's creation as Christian theology claims, the world is an intricate whole emerging out of the interactions of the finite and the infinite. Natural science addresses the finite such as causal nexus in nature, whereas Theology describes the infinite disclosed from revelatory experiences. Without one or the other, only a partial disclosure of the reality is possible, for what Natural science and Theology deal with respectively are both 'real'. To retrieve the holistic vision of the reality as it is, one must pursue the correlation of the disciplines. To this end, this article proposes Tillich's correlative epistemology as a relevant theory that promotes the interdisciplinary study between Theology and Natural science. Specifically, I will examine Tillich's concept of reason and revelation, and then the possibility of an interaction between Science and Theology based on Tillich's epistemology. This study will provide a rationale for bringing scientists and theologians to the same table to articulate the world as God's creation in a more robust way.

Keywords: dialogue, Paul Tillich, epistemology, reason, revelation

1. Introduction

Post-modern epistemology has been heavily impacted by scientific naturalism, which disguises itself as Natural science and asserts that physical Cosmos is all that is. However, reality is more than a realm of physical things, and it is the dynamic synthesis of the finite and the infinite that calls for a holistic epistemology. This article deals with Paul Tillich's concept of reason and revelation. According to Tillich, the correlation of reason and revelation yields a holistic vision of reality. For reality as creation is indebted to God who is the ground of being. In that sense, reality cannot be fully known without revelation. However, it also cannot be grasped without reason because reason is

*E-mail: dk3134@gmail.com

that which examines the nature of being, constructs a logical understanding of reality, and poses an existential question on the threat of non-being by the aid of the depth of reason. Therefore, the correlation of reason and revelation is necessary in terms of knowing reality. My thesis is this: Tillich's epistemology awakens those who are immersed in naturalism and allows them to see reality as it is. In order to show that, I shall explicate his concept of reason and revelation and examine the possibility of a correlation between science and theology in the light of his concept of reason and revelation.

2. Paul Tillich's concept of reason

Tillich divides reason into two realms: one is the ontological concept of reason, which is the structure of the mind that grasps and shapes reality. Another is the technical concept of reason, which deals with the means-ends relationship. He argues that ontological reason has been accompanied with technical reason, and it sometimes has been reduced into the technical reason, thus "reason is reduced to the capacity for 'reasoning'" [1]. The reduction of ontological reason to the technical reason caused some forms of logical positivism through which "the philosopher even refuses to 'understand' anything that transcends technical reason, thus making his philosophy completely irrelevant for questions of existential concern" [1]. For Tillich, the problem of modern culture is the reduction of reason into merely that of logical and scientific thinking, thus that modern reason comes to be that which excludes elements in ontological reason. Tillich strives to synthesize the two reasons, he claims that technical reason is "adequate and meaningful only as an expression of ontological reason and as its companion" [1].

Technical reason is that which provides tools to recognize and control reality, thus it is adequate to establish "a consistent, logical, and correctly derived organism of thought" [1, p. 74]. Tillich argues that technical reason deals with the means-ends relationship. On the other hand, ontological reason deals with the realm of the nature of being, which is a mediation that carries the essence of ontological reason, that is, the content of revelation. Ontological reason is adequate for Theology to use in reasoning the existence of God but it does not mean that technological reason is not necessary. In other words, ontological reason and technical reason should work together in that both of them are necessary to articulate the nature of being (ontological reason) and to express it through logical structure (technical reason) [2].

Tillich claims that what enables one to know of a thing is "the logos structure of the grasping-and-shaping-self and the logos structure of the grasped-and-shaped-world" [1, p. 75]. Tillich introduces the depth of reason, that is, that which precedes reason and is the ground of reason. The subjective and the objective reasons (i.e. the grasping-and-shaping-self and the grasped-and-shaped-world) point to which is immanent in themselves but simultaneously transcendent to themselves. Tillich defines it as "the substance in the rational structure, being-itself in the logos of being; the ground that is creative in every

rational creation, or the abyss which cannot be exhausted by any creation or by any totality of them, or the infinite potentiality of being and meaning which pours into the rational structures of mind and reality, actualizing and transforming them” [1, p. 79]. In that sense, the depth of reason is that which underlies the rational process and the change of the rational structure of reality and mind.

In reasoning, reality becomes intelligible because of the correlation of the logos structures. In terms of the act of knowing, knowing is not possible without being because knowing presupposes the known by the knower. In that sense, Tillich highlights the union of subject-object. As Tillich puts it, “Knowing is a form of union. In every act of knowledge the knower and that which is known are united; the gap between subject and object is overcome. The subject ‘grasps’ the object, adapts it to itself, and, at the same time, adapts itself to the object.” [1, p. 94]

The union presupposes a distance between the knower and the known. “In order to know, one must ‘look’ at a thing, and, in order to look at a thing, one must be ‘at a distance’. Cognitive distance is the presupposition of cognitive union.” [1, p. 94] In that regard, Tillich criticizes the sided emphasis either on subjectivity or on objectivity. Tillich refutes “receiving knowledge” which “takes the object into itself, into union with the subject” [1, p. 98]. It is related to the emotional element of a subject, thus knowledge attaches the object to the emotion of the subject. “Emotion is the vehicle for receiving recognition. But the vehicle is far from making the content itself emotional. The content is rational, something to be verified, to be looked at with critical caution.” [1, p. 98] Receiving knowledge is a biased impression that is heavily impacted by one’s emotion.

In addition, Tillich rejects controlling knowledge with a type of knowledge that is overwhelmed by separation in the relation. It is an example of technical reason, which “unites subject and object for the sake of the control of the object by the subject. It transforms the object into a completely conditioned and calculable ‘thing’.” [1, p. 97] Controlling knowledge objectifies every being not only logically but also ontologically and ethically, which is in effect another subject. In that regard, Tillich criticizes Kantian philosophy because it weakened the significance of the object in terms of cognition. As Tillich puts it, “No thing, however, is merely a thing. Since everything that participates in the self-world structure of being, elements of self-relatedness are universal.” [1, p. 97]

Tillich refutes the extremes and strives for constructing a correlational epistemic method through which one comes to grasp and to shape reality as theonomy, which is the synthesis of the subjective and the objective logos, of the divine and the mundane, and of the finite and the infinite. For example, Tillich refutes formalism that rules out emotionalism. This is because daily phenomena enfold the elements of emotion, thus if one excludes the emotional aspects of reason, then s/he would fail to carry out the role of reason that is grasping the reality and shaping it. On the other hand, Tillich also rejects extreme emotionalism, which arises against extreme formalism. Emotionalism negates all

kinds of formal reasoning, which is critically related to the function of technical reason that constructs the logical structure of reality. Either extreme cannot accurately grasp and shape reality, rather they distort it, thus it results in the failure of posing the existential question that is critically related to the revelatory answer. Furthermore, without revelation, reason alone is not possible to bring about the synthetic union of the extremes in the sense that for Tillich existence as such is unstable, thus that reason in existence fails to bring about the theonomous understanding of reality. Reason calls for revelation in order to grasp and to shape the reality as it is [1, p. 89-91].

3. Tillich's concept of revelation

Mystery is derived from a word, *muein*, which means closing the eyes or closing the mouth. In that sense, it differs from the method of gaining ordinary knowledge, which is simply done by the act of seeing and of confronting objects. Therefore, the term, *muein*, presupposes that genuine mystery “transcends the act of seeing, of confronting objects whose structures and relations present themselves to a subject for his knowledge” [1, p. 108]. Mystery precedes subject-object relationships in ordinary cognition. Nevertheless, mystery becomes a matter of experience in revelation. Tillich argues that revelation is the manifestation of mystery “within the context of ordinary experience which transcends the ordinary context of experience” [1, p. 109]. Revelation is the manifestation of mystery in the form of cognitive elements; however, it simultaneously is still mystery in the sense that what is revealed cannot be the whole reality of the mystery. Thus, “revelation does not dissolve the mystery into knowledge” [1, p. 109]. Mystery remains as mystery even after it is revealed.

Revelation is that which is given and manifest in a concrete situation and manner because it necessarily calls for the subjective reception of revelation as well as for the objective occurrence of revelation. With regard to the receiving-subjective side, Tillich calls such an epistemic activity as ‘ecstasy’, that is, standing outside oneself. It is not the negation of reason, but rather it is a state of mind in which reason is beyond itself. Tillich argues that ecstasy occurs when the mind is grasped by mystery, that is, the ground of being. He differentiates the ecstasy from that of esoteric mysteries. Tillich criticizes the colloquial usage of the word, ‘ecstasy’, in terms of its biased subjectivism, which discloses that “Only something subjective happens in a state of religious overexcitement, often artificially produced. Therefore, it has no revelatory power.” [1, p. 113] Tillich refutes extreme subjectivism. For, as noted earlier, it presupposes a distance between subject and object. Extreme subjectivism destroys the distance and reduces the object to the object of egoistic manipulation. As Langdon Gilkey puts it, “Without a measure of *distance* from the object there can be no knowing: the subject must detach itself in order to know its object; complete union without distinction obliterates knowing.” [3] Likewise, for Tillich, the revelatory experience also presupposes the distance between self and the mystery revealed,

because the self is elevated in the experience rather than dissolved into the abyss of the infinite [1, p. 113-114].

The threat of non-being produces ontological shock that is derived from the negative side of the mystery of being. It is the experience of abyss and of the instability of my own being, thus the experience necessarily brings about the fundamental question of being and non-being. Tillich claims that ontological shock, which produces this fundamental question, is raised up in ecstasy, but that the shock is also overcome in the ecstatic experience. For the experience is a moment of encountering divine presence, the mystery, the ground of being, and the answer. As Tillich puts it, "It is preserved in the annihilating power of the divine presence (*mysterium tremendum*) and is overcome in the elevating power of the divine presence (*mysterium fascinans*)."

 [1, p. 113]

Since that which the mind encounters in the ecstatic experience is the ground of being, ecstasy does not destroy the rational structure of the mind. Rather, reason is preserved and even elevated in ecstasy. That is why ecstasy is called inspiration. Tillich points out that the term has been misused to describe non-reflective acts of cognition, and that the abuse of the term has rendered one to misunderstand the inspiration of the biblical writings, the mechanical inspiration. Tillich claims that that sort of doctrine of inspiration is demonic. For "it destroys the rational structure which is supposed to receive inspiration" [1, p. 114]. Divine inspiration presupposes the receptibility of itself by the rational structure of the mind, and it is not that which destroys the mind but elevates the mind to "a new dimension of knowledge, the dimension of understanding in relation to our ultimate concern and to the mystery of being" [1, p. 115].

Revelatory experience does not destroy the rational structure of reality either. Divine manifestation is related to miracle, which is the giving side of revelation. The term, 'miracle', is often misunderstood as the event of contradicting the laws of nature. Tillich argues that the religious meaning of miracle has nothing to do with the violation of the laws of nature because miracle as revelation presupposes the rational structure of reality through which the miracle occurs. If the miracle violates the laws of nature, it destroys a potential medium through which God manifests itself in the realm of finitude. Then the violation of the laws of nature becomes the self-destruction of the ground of being. Tillich claims, "Miracles cannot be interpreted in terms of a supernatural interference in natural processes. If such an interpretation were true, the manifestation of the ground of being would destroy the structure of being; God would be split within himself, as religious dualism has asserted." [1, p. 116]

The Greek word that is often translated as miracle is, *semeion*, sign. Adding the word 'event' to 'sign', Tillich claims, the phrase 'sign-event' is more appropriate to describe the experience of revelation. For revelation is not a universally given reality, but rather it occurs in a concrete situation, thus it is momentary. Therefore, revelation, being given, must be a unique event to a person or to a group that receives it. Tillich differentiates between sign and symbol [4]. From the momentary experience of the sign-event, a person comes to encounter the power of being that sustains every being including oneself.

Such an experience produces ‘symbols’ by which one expresses the manifestation of the power of being, and that which her community accepts as revelatory via intersubjectivity. During the process of the revelatory experience and its critical reflection, the person’s culture is employed to provide the signs that are potential symbols and the hermeneutic data by which the person and her community understand the revelatory experience [5]. In doing so, natural-cultural-religious signs become symbols that contain and express the power of being.

All beings have a possibility of becoming bearers of the mystery of being because they participate in the ground of being for their existence. These potential mediums of revelation, however, do not lose their own independence. When one refers to God as ‘rock of ages’, the metaphor still preserves its own character as natural being ‘rock’ while it points to the mystery of God [1, p. 118].

When mystery is revealed through a natural being, the revelation through this medium is an ambiguous mixture of the regular and the irregular. By the regular in revelation Tillich means the natural character of the medium. In other words, the metaphor ‘rock of ages’, preserves the character of rock as changeless and relates it to divine character as faithfulness. In that sense, the natural character of the rock is still preserved in its metaphorical usage. The regular ‘rock’ is grasped and elevated to the ‘extraordinarily regular’ by which the mystery of being becomes manifest. In the extraordinarily regular, the divine manifests itself because it is the ground of being to the rational structure of reality [1, p. 118-119]. On the other hand, by the irregular Tillich means the abyss that is the negative side of the mystery, which produces the ontological shock. Even though the divine is revealed through the medium of natural beings, it still is mystery that transcends the regular of the finite. In that sense, it is called the extraordinarily irregular and the leap in terms of Kierkegaard’s symbol, “which leaves everything regular and rational behind” [1, p. 119].

Tillich argues that Jesus as the Christ is final revelation. The final revelation does not signify last revelation, but it is the revelation which becomes the criterion of every revelation as such. With regard to the criterion of revelation, Tillich argues that there are two critical prerequisites. First, the medium of revelation has to negate itself to point to a revelatory reality. Second, the medium must not lose itself while pointing out the ultimate concern. If a medium satisfies the two prerequisites, then it becomes the bearer of revelation, and revelation occurs. The medium must not claim anything for itself but for the ground of being [6]. If the medium fails to negate itself and claims itself as the revelation, then it is degraded into idolatry. On the other hand, if the medium loses itself and is dissolved into the ground of being, then that which the medium mediates is the demonic power that swallows the being of the medium, thus there is no revelation of the ground of being but that of the demon. The Christ negates himself without losing himself. The Christ as the Son of God is *united* with the ground of being whereas other mediums are potentially so. The Christ possesses himself completely, but he negates himself to point out the ground of

being. It is the self-surrender of the Christ. He surrenders himself to become the bearer of the final revelation. In that regard, Jesus as the Christ is the final revelation as such as well as the bearer of it [1, p. 133].

For Tillich, revelation is a given phenomenon in the revelatory event of ecstasy and miracle. In revelation, a person is grasped and elevated to encounter divine mystery. Revelation is heavily dependent on divine action because God manifests through mediums, which enter into the revelatory constellation. That which renders potential mediums enter into the revelatory constellation is also the divine action. In that regards, Tillich affirms the revelation through nature. Tillich affirms a possibility of revelation through natural beings including inanimate beings such as rock, tree, and so on. For they are potential mediums, and if God manifests through natural beings using them as mediums, then revelation through nature can be conceivable. In that sense, Tillich's concept of revelation seems to open a potential conversation between science and theology. Therefore, in the following, I shall examine Tillich's concept of reason and revelation in the context of Science and Theology.

4. The correlation of Science and Theology

John F. Haught claims with Tillich, "Science and theology are independent ways of arriving at truth, and so one cannot logically contradict the other" [7]. Theology is involved with the ultimate concern of all beings that endows them with ultimate meaning. On the other hand, Natural science as such is not a study of meaning but of natural matter. Tillich argues that scientific truth is not that which confirms the truth of faith, because scientific research is indebted to technical reason. Technical reason by itself is not able to engage the realm of being and of the infinite. In that regard, technical reason necessarily calls for ontological reason (being), and ultimately for revelation (Being itself) [8]. For Tillich, knowledge of God does not belong to the realm of so-called natural theology. This is because God is mystery, the ground of being, the transcendence, and the infinite. Tillich claims that knowledge of God starts from the existential question of one's own being. The question arises out of encountering the threat of non-being, which calls for revelation, that is, God's manifestation in miracle and ecstasy.

If that is the case, can there be an on-going battle between Science and Theology? Tillich would answer, no. The battle that is taking place is a battle between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism. Naturalism strives to describe all natural phenomena through naturalistic ideology. In other words, for the naturalists, the natural world is self-sufficient and self-contained, thus they argue that God is not needed. The Universe *just is*. Therefore, naturalism is not natural science since they cross the boundary of the scientific method, and make a philosophical and an even theological argument concerning the existence of being. For Tillich, naturalism is an attempt to articulate the infinite with ontological reason, which is finite and impossible without revelation [9]. Supernaturalism, on the other hands, is an ideology which strives to describe

natural phenomena in terms of interventionistic divine providence or action. For them, the natural world is operated by divine intervention, thus they look for evidence in order to argue that God acts in natural world. Tillich would respond to their argument by warning that those attempts reduce the incomprehensible mystery into a finite natural cause among other causes. For Tillich, God remains as mystery even after S/He manifests in revelation.

Natural science as such deals with the objectifiable realm of the reality. Even though some might say that the physical universe is mystery, the Universe still remains an object that is researchable with reason. In contrast, religion deals with the mystery that cannot be objectifiable by reason alone. For, as Tillich argues, Theology starts from revelation. "Encountering revelation entails our being grasped by it, not a grasping or objectifying of it (DF, 76). Faith is an ecstatic form of knowing in which reason humbly allows itself to be apprehended by God, that is, by the depth, ground and power of being." [7, p. 224] Religious epistemology is critically different from scientific epistemology in terms of their object of cognition and their starting point. In that sense Science and Theology are not contradictory each other. Rather, they both are needed in terms of Tillich's method of correlation because the reality that one experiences is the phenomena of the infinite and the finite.

Then a critical question still remains as unsolved. Does Theology only deal with the infinite and Science with the finite? Is there no interaction between the two? If so, is that a true correlation? Edmund Husserl highlights an appropriate *attitude* to involve oneself in a cognitive act. For example, if one is involved in arithmetic study, then s/he has to take an arithmetical attitude that makes arithmetic cognition possible. If the person takes other attitudes while s/he is involved in the arithmetic cognition, then the person either reduces or distorts his/her arithmetic cognition into another domain [10]. Husserl presents the phenomenological method to solve an epistemic problem, that is, dominant scientific reasoning. By dominant scientific reasoning Husserl means that people easily substitute other attitudes for the scientific attitude which brings about a failure of the proper cognition or the reduction of a certain cognition into the domain of science. Thus, he argues that, according to the object of cognition, the objectivating attitude has to change [10].

Similarly, Tillich highlights distinctive epistemic methods for each cognitive domain. In other words, Tillich defines the domain of Science (technical reason) as basing the logical structure of reality, that of Philosophy (ontological reason) as raising the existential question, and that of Theology (revelation) as answering that question. This epistemic distinction is a functional distinction, thus a theologian is able to raise philosophical questions and vice versa. However, emphasizing the distinctive functions of each discipline, Tillich underscores that one should change their cognitive method according to the object of cognition. Science and Philosophy deal with physical cosmos and the nature of being, which is involved in examining one's existence and posing an existential question. On the other hand, Theology deals with Being-itself that is the ultimate concern and meaning of beings and is the answer to the question

that is posed in the situation of existential anxiety [11]. Reality that is given universally to all human beings regardless of their cultural-religious backgrounds is comprised with physico-chemical matters, their complex combinations, and immaterial phenomena such as values and meanings. There is the need of the correlation due to “the real interdependence of things or events” [12]. In that regards, Science, Philosophy, and Theology should be correlated to grasp and to shape reality as the dynamic synthesis of the finite and the infinite, but they simultaneously are distinguished from one another because of their epistemic domains.

Tillich’s correlative epistemology is highly fruitful in terms of the Theology and Science dialogue. For Tillich does not at all separate each discipline of Science, Philosophy and Theology but rather he underscores the correlation of them. Each discipline alone cannot be enough to understand reality that is interwoven by the finite and the infinite. But, if they are correlative in terms of knowing reality, it would produce a holistic vision. Science and Philosophy asks for Theology. For all beings participate in the ground of being for their existence, and the ground of being is immanent as well as transcendent in reality. Theology asks for Science and Philosophy, because all natural beings are potential mediums of revelation. The knowledge of a natural being that is the object of Science and Philosophy contributes to understand God’s revelation through the natural being. In addition, Theology deals with the ultimate concern in the comprehensible form of human reason, and it articulates the mystery symbolically employing reason that is critically related to Science and Philosophy. Therefore, science, philosophy, and theology cannot be separated in terms of knowing the infinite through finite mediums, and they cannot be in conflict, but rather they are all interrelated in terms of articulating the ultimate meaning of reality.

5. Conclusions

Reality is known by the act of reason, which consists of technical and ontological reason and of objective and subjective reason. Technical reason deals with means-end relationships, and ontological reason deals with the nature of being. In addition, objective reason is the rational structure of reality, and subjective reason is the rational structure of mind. In terms of knowing reality, the correlation of technical and ontological reason and of objective and subjective reason is necessary. However, reason alone cannot grasp reality as such because reason itself is indebted to the depth of reason, which is the ground of being through whom reason itself can act and on whom all beings are dependent.

Knowing the infinite, therefore, is critical in the sense that without the knowledge of the ground of being one never comes to grasp reality correctly. God as the ground of being manifests itself in revelation, which is an ecstatic experience in a miraculous event. Revelation presupposes the objective giving of God and the subjective reception of a human person. The absence of either one

or the other does not constitute revelation as such. Furthermore, revelation is an answer to an existential question that is raised by a person who is situated on the threat of non-being. The revelation is inseparable from the existential question posed by reason. Hence, in terms of *knowing* as such, the correlation of reason and revelation is essential.

With regards to the scientific naturalism, it is not a pure science that is supposed to deal with causality in nature. Naturalism crosses the boundary of Natural science and in effect makes a metaphysical argument disguising itself as pure science. In that regards, there is no on-going battle between Science and Theology, rather, Science as such, which is practiced by technical reason, is critical in terms that it constructs a logical structure for dealing with the nature of being. Furthermore, Science is important in the sense that natural being that is the object of Science is a potential medium of revelation through which mystery manifests itself. Therefore, the correlation of Science and Theology is necessary in terms of knowing reality.

References

- [1] P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1951, 72–73.
- [2] D. Emmet, *Epistemology and the Idea of Revelation*, in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, C.W. Kegley (ed.), 2nd edn., Pilgrim Press, New York, 1982, 244.
- [3] L.B. Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, Crossroad Pub. Co, New York, 1990, 37.
- [4] P. Slater, *Toronto Journal of Theology*, **31(1)** (2015) 108.
- [5] S.B. Murray, *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*, **42(3)** (2016) 4.
- [6] A. Pryor, *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*, **42(3)** (2016) 15.
- [7] J.F. Haught, *Tillich in Dialogue with Natural Science*, in *The Cambridge companion to Paul Tillich*, R. Remanning (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Boston, 223.
- [8] P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Harper Collins, New York, 2011, 93–94.
- [9] P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963, 19.
- [10] E. Husserl, *Ideas: pertaining to a pure phenomenological philosophy*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Boston, 1983, 13.
- [11] D.R. Mason, *Anglican Theological Review*, **97(3)** (2015) 442.
- [12] R.J. Russell, *Zygon*, **36(2)** (2001) 271.