

Spirit/matter interaction. A non-dualistic view

Since Parmenides, this is expressed in his Poem on Nature: the question of monism has been on the philosophical agenda. The poem says that dualism is a human interpretation: human mind reads the two forms unto the world, the one spiritual, other material: “Mortals have settled in their minds to speak of two forms, one of which they should have left out. (...) They have assigned an opposite substance to each, and marks distinct from one another”.ⁱ Parmenides expresses that all is one and he says that the goddess of justice rules the universe. “Everything is full of what is”, the poem says.ⁱⁱ Further: “For you cannot know what is not – that is impossible – nor utter it”.ⁱⁱⁱ What should have been left out is the interpretation of matter as an independent substance with form or forms of its own; rude materialism belongs to opinion, to “men deaf and blind”.^{iv} What can be known is only that what is and which permeates the All. In Parmenides’ being there is otherness and difference. The Western philosophy of being starts here. I do not aim to travel the journey of being, but I try to lift up some central aspects of Tillich’s late monism, which he arrived at during the last two decades of his life. I also discuss it in relation to some societal and cultural phenomena in today’s local/global world.

Differential Monism

The question of monism, if monism is possible at all, what it would be like, is still on philosophical agenda. Today it is argued that if there was monism, it is to be searched in the direction of life, in the philosophy of life.^v Tillich pointed that “the task remains as one which is no more or less than a philosophy of life in all its ramifications”, he did not had time for that “which (...) is the task of the systematic theologian of our time”.^{vi} In Tillich’s view: “The first principle is the unity of life”.^{vii} Difference, so it seems to me, in Tillich lies in the realization or actualization of potentiality, in individuation. Tillich’s is, in his own terms: “the monistic view of humankind and her/his world” and life is “a system of mutual preconditions for the actualization of potencies of being”.^{viii} I speak about Differential Monism: life is a unity, but it is not the same in all its ramifications. Life-processes in the spiritual dimension are analogous to those in the inorganic dimension, but they are not the same, as history, or the evolutionary process adds and creates something new that is not in the inorganic dimension: self-awareness and self-consciousness, the possibility of conscious decisions, choices and future-orientations.^{ix} Life in Tillich’s view is “self-transcendence and return to itself in one and the same act”, here we have the “basic character of all life processes”.^x Life expands and life contracts itself in the same moment, both movements are in life; in life there are the contrasting elements. Our task is to identify some of the contrasting elements in the life-event. It is to be emphasized that life is always a life. How to speak about life, if it is always a life? As we try to get a glimpse of it,

reflectively, life slips out of our sight; life is to be known in the event of life, from the below. Here we touch some of the semantical and epistemological ambiguities or paradoxes of life.

In a standard understanding of monism plurality, difference, diversity and individuality of things disappear in the All; the only thing there has been, is, and will be is the One or God. Tillich's monism does not deny difference. "Certainly", Tillich wrote, "the differences (...) are not denied, but they are not derived from the difference of levels, but from the contrasting elements which are present equally in all dimensions of life".^{xi} I have pointed to the contrast between the inorganic and the spiritual dimension: that between the life-processes in the inorganic and the life-processes in the spiritual dimension, the contrast is that the aware decision-making and future-oriented capability seems to be lacking in the inorganic. In the inorganic only some of the potentials are actualized, further down on the road of evolution, the growing complexity is a sign of wider and deeper realization, more and more of potential possibilities become actualized. Tillich put this in the following way: "Certainly, in the inorganic realm, there is nothing actually organic, or actually psychological or actually spiritual. But potentially these other dimensions are present. In the atom the spiritual power which produced Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is potentially real, just as in the spiritual act which produced *Hamlet*, there participated the movement of the atoms".^{xii} What Tillich seems to say is that it is the actualization that gives the contrasting elements! Behind the realization and actualization there is, so Tillich,

the movement of reality as a whole (which) enables some potentialities to become actual while excluding others from actualization in the same space or at the same time. The movement of the universe with its historical quality of life excluded for billions of years the actualization of beings under the predominance of the organic and the spiritual dimensions.^{xiii}

The contrasting elements might be identified in terms of potentiality and actuality: the actualization creates a contrast and a difference in relation to the preceding, so between the inorganic and the organic and so between the human life and the animal life. Actualizations seem to happen in interaction and codependence with the rest of the universe; life is interaction. I think that we are able to speak about the contrasting elements with the help of the constellational concepts, like potentiality and actuality. I have named Tillich's position that of differential monism, trying to mark the differential elements in this non-duality. I think that these elements could be made discernible with the help of constellational concepts.

Constellational concepts

There is the in-otherness of dimensions, they meet in one point, at the same time they are apart from each other, each dimension allows for the study of that dimension alone; there is holism and

there are the individual sciences. It is the holistic trend in Tillich's multidimensional view I try to catch here. There is no dogmatic understanding of the view, but dimensions could be named and identified in different ways. Tillich wrote: "In speaking of life processes, one can speak of as many dimensions as one chooses to express basic differences".^{xiv} I try to identify some basic differences with the help of two pairs of constellational concepts: potentiality and actuality and positive and negative. Today we have constellational concepts in ecological thought: it is said that paradigms or overall frames of understanding are "constellations of concepts, perceptions, values, and practices"^{xv}. There are multiple paradigms around; Tillich's multidimensional monistic view of reality gives a paradigmatic constellation. "The unity of life", Tillich wrote, "cannot be restricted to humankind."^{xvi} He would have been in agreement with the ecological thought: there is the more-than-human world.^{xvii} To speak about constellation and constellational concepts points to a holistic direction, the use of them we find even in Tillich, and no wonder, as even he was on his way to a holistic view with his differential monism.

The purpose of this session is to look forward, to that how Tillich's thinking and its developmental possibilities could be taken further or forward today. So let me do something with Tillich's corpus, let me change some emphasis in the central concepts. Instead of speaking about the power of being, I speak about *potentiality in the materiality of things*. This helps us to come closer to the non-dualistic view. Tillich himself held with the power of being, but he seemed more and more to understand the power of being as the power of potentiality in the materiality of things. "In all life processes all dimensions of life are always present", and he continues that this presupposes the "distinction of the actual and the potential. Both the actual and the potential are realities, the potential in the sense that it is not yet [or no longer] actual, but has the power of becoming real, the actual in the sense that it has used its power of becoming actual".^{xviii} Potentiality in the materiality of the thing and the actuality of the material thing are two sides of the same thing. What differentiates things from each other is how many of potential possibilities are realized this far at this particular point of development.

Potentiality and actuality I take as constellational concepts: the one cannot be comprehended without the other. It is the actuality or realization of the thing that differentiates it from other things, humankind from atoms for example, giving basic differences in space and time, in history and in the final product of history. God, in Tillich's view, is not drawn in the realization and actualization in time and space: "That of which theology speaks transcends all temporal and causal conditions, it transcends the gap between potentiality and actuality".^{xix} Still God "is present in every life process as its creative and directing ground".^{xx} Creation is the creation of potentials: "Essential treehood and essential manhood and essential animal-hood are, so to speak, in eternal peace in the

ground of the divine life: when God envisages them in eternity”, Tillich said.^{xxi} Some signs of the essential animal-hood could be seen in each particular animal, as it is an example of and carrier of essence or potentiality; it is an ambiguous mix of existential and essential elements. Tillich emphasizes that both aspects have to be taken into account, a one-sided interpretation does not give a fair picture of things. In existence, Tillich thought, the bond of identity between essence and the particular thing is broken, still potentiality is present in each material thing, as the positive in the thing. Here we come to the other pair of constellational concepts, that between the positive and the negative. Tillich identified potentials as the positive in an individual thing: the positive is “the created essence of a thing”, he wrote.^{xxii} I would like to say that the positive in a created thing is both the potentiality and the materiality of the thing in interaction with each other. The two sides of the thing could be called, following Giorgio Agamben’s interpretation of Aristotle, “the generic potentiality” and “the existing potentiality”.^{xxiii} The generic potentiality is the reached material state of the thing; the existing potentiality is the present power of potentiality in the materiality of the thing which it could use or not use: its power to be or not to be, its spirit, actual or potential. This means, among other things, that the materiality of things is thoroughly spiritual. We live in a reality in which spirit and matter are in constant interaction with each other. Under ideal conditions a thing is able to realize its own most potentialities and the form of the particular thing is an integrated whole within the unity of life. A thing is a form of life. When the negative distorts the positive at the stage of ambiguous life, truth becomes fake news, morals become utilitarian calculating, beauty loses its depth and the potentialities have hard times in trying to find a form of life that might synchronize them. We are able to explicate contrasting elements also by speaking about the positive and the negative in terms of the expressive language:

The positive and the negative in differential relation

The positive and the negative are differential elements; the one cannot be identified without the other. The demoniac presupposes the positive it destroys. “Concepts like the demonic”, Tillich wrote, “are not matters of an Aristotelian definition; they are rather matters of a constellational definition. You must see the concept in all of its many aspects; and then an image of its meaning will develop in your minds”.^{xxiv} Aristotelian definition I take in the sense that we say “what” a thing is; we try to give a definition of it. A one-sided, Aristotelian definition of the demonic would mean that only the negative is explicated, but that is impossible as this concept is, Tillich wrote, “ambiguous; that it is always positive and negative at the same time and cannot be the one without the other. ... The destructive has no ultimate reality by itself. It can only be by using something which is positive.”^{xxv} The negative presupposes the positive, which it misuses, attacks and distorts. Use under the power

of the negative becomes misuse and abuse, like the slavery of young people in keeping the internet-business going.

I think the following is the axiom of Tillich's differential monism: "There is always the positive the presupposition of the negative but never the other way around".^{xxvi} The negative in Tillich's view has no existence of its own, it is not to be identified with matter, materiality, nature or body, or technology, which as such belong to the positive, the negative is that what distorts the positive, creating the ambiguity of life. The two poles belong together; to speak about the one without the other is not possible, we need constellational concepts. Here some examples of the differential relation in Tillich: "We cannot see the divine glory except when we know the human misery; we cannot see the human misery except if we see it in the light of the divine glory".^{xxvii} God, it is said in the same lecture, "always does everything in everything" and we cannot "take away the element of the presence of the divine in every moment of time and space. If you take THIS away, then you have ACTUALLY destroyed the idea of God".^{xxviii} The negative interpretation, one could say, destroys the positive. Tillich considered that both Luther and Calvin agreed in God's presence and activity in every moment of time and space. In finite beings, while grasped by the Spiritual Presence, Tillich claims, the "positive experience is always united with the awareness of its contrary, the state of unhappiness, despair, condemnation".^{xxix} "The Spiritual Presence is also effective in pushing us into the experience of despair", he wrote.^{xxx} What we have today, so Tillich, is "the absent God as a work of the Spiritual Presence. The shaking of the Religions and the Secular".^{xxxi} In any one-sided interpretation either the negative or the positive is exposed not the differential relation or correlation explicating the opposites. It is not understood that God might be negatively present in the subject, driving us to awareness of the positive and the negative conditions of life. "Here we have", said Tillich, "appearing already in nature, an indication of a character of all existence which is most disturbing in thought as well as in reality, namely that the negation of life, which we experience in every pain, is a condition of life – and the more so, the richer the life is".^{xxxii} The positive and the negative are contrasting pairs or constellational concepts in the wholeness of life.

Speaking about the absent God we say that God is dead, but we do not follow Nietzsche in his saying that it is we, given our culturally formed frames of reference, that have killed God, that is, God has no place in our mentality or spirituality.^{xxxiii} God might have a place in another kind of mentality or spirituality than we have today. I would like to say that speaking in terms of the differential relation is theology after Nietzsche. Tillich was one of the few, with Walter Kaufmann and Gilles Deleuze who understood what Nietzsche's philosophy was about. After Tillich it is feminist theologians who have understood that abundant life is material life, life in relationality in new materiality. As an alternative to those cultural patterns and value-orientations Nietzsche identified in

Western culture and for which he was searching alternatives, Tillich's non-dualistic and holistic multidimensional view or reality could be seen as an alternative. Given this view, each thing has inherent value in itself thanks to its potentiality.

What is happening on the net?

In the following I try to discuss some presents societal and cultural phenomena in the light of the monistic view. Internet was not a reality during the 1950's and 1960's, but the talk of "the split personality and a slip society" was common. Is the internet with social media and digitalization really a blessing for humanity or one more confirmation and condensation of the split state of mind? There is hatred and destructive images of the other in the social media and in the news; disguised or open, there are the reactive affects. In a world filled with reactive affects, the talk of differential relation might turn the tide: that we are aware of the reactive affect depends on the positive or the active mind; "the negative presupposes the positive but never the other way around". We might come to our senses and rise up to a new level of understanding.

The society and the individual are in interaction with each other; the split in one is reflected in the other and *vice versa*. In such a context reactive affects might be seen as mental elements people let loose on the net; reactions and hate in social media might be seen as "outsourced" elements of the split personality, affirmed by the split society, which in its turn speeds up the split in the personality. I think the polarization of the present political climate is an example of this. It is not the technology or the news as such that is the bad thing, but the perversion of life we find there. Tillich talks about

the structural understanding of everything which happens in humankind. Human life knows no completely isolated event. Everything that happens in humankind is connected with everything. (...) Everything that happens in the human being is based on something positive, even the so-called perverted.^{xxxiv}

The perversion is not accepted but shown as what it is: "We make it very clear by our whole being, that we consider this as a perversion, or as a destruction, but that we know that, behind this very perversion or distortion, is present the special power (potentiality I would say) of the positive which is distorted".^{xxxv} The released hate in social media and in the news is a perversion and distortion. The positive shows the negative, even when the felt elements of personality, which should stand connected with the existing potentiality, are far removed from that connection. This echo or vibration in the net, if we now speak in those terms, is at the same time a call to wholeness and connectedness, not with the internet-community, but with life in each of us, so that we might find the center of personality re-gathered in synchronicity with the generic and the existing potentiality.

This is not a possibility for a few, but for all people and all things, as all things are built of the generic potentiality (matter) and the existing potentiality (spirit).

The negative presupposes the positive of which it is a distortion. Individuals and societies are in interaction with each other. To heal the individual is to heal the society; to heal the society is to heal the individual. Forgiveness is the acceptance of the unacceptable. "Acceptance", Tillich said, "has always two sides. The negative side is that we accept all existence as it is – all the negativities, threats and destructive elements. And the other side is that the act of accepting in itself is possible only in the power of something positive which gives us the courage to accept".^{xxxvi} In acceptance, so Tillich, the positive and the negative go together. Pastoral theology, Tillich wrote,

deals with humankind in his or her *essential* potentialities and his or her *existential* actualities. (...) No statement about God can be made which is not rooted in the correlation between humankind's self-awareness and the experience of the divine presence. Every change on one side of this correlation changes the whole correlation.^{xxxvii}

If we said that all positive is in God and all the bad things in human beings, then we changed the whole correlation. If we said that there is the positive in the material/spiritual life: in minerals, plants, animals and humankind, indeed in all life, and if we said that it is this positive in life that is to be affirmed in pastoral care and in healing, then we have a different correlation compared with the preceding. "The spiritual", Tillich wrote, "is the fulfillment of the organic and its potentialities, not its distortion".^{xxxviii} Tillich ends his text on pastoral theology by saying that

the question of the relation between the divine Spirit and the human spirit is the question of healing in the different dimensions in which humankind lives and through which he or she participates in all life. (...) These elements represent different dimensions of a unity. One can speak of the multi-dimensional unity of life as it appears in humankind.^{xxxix}

The multidimensional unity is not only in America, or in Sweden or in Finland for that part, or in humankind only, it is all over in every point of the finite world. All dimensions of life are present in each dimension of life, so globally, so locally and so in the individual as well. "All functions of healing" Tillich wrote, "belong together: The helper must heal the whole person. (...) The divine Spirit, wherever it works, is related to the functions of the spirit as well as those of self-awareness and bodily self-realization. (...) In all these dimensions it is healing – but fragmentarily".¹ Even healing is a constellational, holistic concept. A helper speaks the language of wholeness and mediation, in life and about life. Needless to say, I think it is in and through the differential relation that God's Spirit

¹ bMS 649/83 (4), p. 11.

works in the human spirit. If there is a point of mediation, it is there. I end this paper by saying few things about Tillich's value-theory as it could be understood in the light of the monistic view.

Potentiality and value

In Tillich's view, "value cannot be derived from existence. (...) Values must be derived from essential structures of being which appear in existence".^{xi} It is not only human beings who are carriers of values, but all things have their potential dimension, value-dimension. "If we judge", Tillich again, "the value of a tree, not from the point of view of its wood or shade value for us, but from the point of view of its potentialities as a tree for itself", we get "an objective value in this realm (...), namely the value of a tree for itself".^{xii} In the perception of a tree there is both the *empirical element*, this particular tree, and the *ideating element*, which is "the intuition of the essence within some existing exemplars".^{xiii} Given this, an individual tree or a thing has its potential realm and a value of its own, independent of human evaluation or projection of values. When it comes to human beings, there is in Tillich's view "the value of individual uniqueness".^{xiii} This uniqueness is restricted as each thing stands in interaction with all other things. The value "is restricted by the way in which the individual person becomes a person only through the encounter with other persons".^{xiv} In that encounter "the potential realm comes to expression as the demand of ought-to-be".^{xv} The value of a tree might be encountered in that particular tree. In human life value is encountered in the person to person encounter. "Value is", Tillich wrote, "humankind's essential being, put as an imperative against him or her. (...) Values) are determined by what humankind essentially is".^{xvi} Human essences or potentials, values, Tillich writes "can be known: the knowledge of values is identical with the knowledge of one's essential being. And this occurs in two complementary ways, the intuitive and the experiential", Tillich wrote.^{xvii} Alienated as we are, values appear in human life as "laws, natural and positive laws, demanding, threatening, promising".^{xviii} Still, in some rare moments we are capable of intuiting and experiencing the potential realm in ourselves and in other living beings, human and the more-than-human beings. This is what Tillich seems to admit. It means, among other things, that the experience of the ought-to-be is not primarily derived from the law, but from the experience of potentiality in the person-to-person encounter.

Given Tillich's value-theory, we could talk about being/value potentiality as a holistic constellational concept. Being/value potentiality, we might say, comes to expression in the individual/society/culture/environment interaction. For us human being the encounter of person-to-person is basic, it is in that encounter we become what we are. Environmental action today is about creating a sustainable environment. Environmental problems we have because human use has become human abuse of natural resources, including matter, plants, animals and human beings. The human world has put its power over the more-than-human world and we think that things in the

more-than-human world are without the value of their own. If we admitted that all things have their own value, the use of bodies^{xlix} for utility-purposes in industry, commerce and human interaction becomes impossible. The slavery of humankind and animal-kind to the machine might end. We might start to perceive life according to itself, from life itself.

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- ⁱ Poem of Parmenides: on nature. VIII, 50-55. Translated by John Burnet (1892).
<http://philoctetes.free.fr/parmenidesunicode.htm>. Retrieved 20181025. Copyright © Samuel Béreau.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid., VIII, 02. See also Plato, 2013, *Parmenides*, 128a. In Platon, *Skrifter. Bok 4/Texts. Book 4*. Atlantis, Stockholm, p. 55.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., II, 5.
- ^{iv} Ibid., VI, 5.
- ^v Giorgio Agamben, 1999, *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- ^{vi} Paul Tillich, 1958/59, Dimensions, Levels and the Unity of Life. bMS 649/82 (17), p. 13.
- ^{vii} Paul Tillich, n.d., The Doctrine of the Spirit. Three Lectures, Lecture I. bMS 649/53 (1), p. 2.
- ^{viii} Tillich, Dimensions, p. 13 and p. 8.
- ^{ix} See for example Tillich, The Doctrine of the Spirit, p. 3.
- ^x Tillich, Dimensions, p. 12.
- ^{xi} Ibid., p. 6.
- ^{xii} Ibid., p. 7.
- ^{xiii} Ibid., p. 7.
- ^{xiv} Ibid., p. 6.
- ^{xv} Stanley Krippner, 2010, The holistic paradigm. World Futures; The Journal of New Paradigm Research. Vol 30 1991 - Issue 3. Online publication.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02604027.1991.9972203?journalCode=gwof20>. Retrieved 2018-10-16
- ^{xvi} Tillich, Dimensions, p. 1.
- ^{xvii} David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*.
- ^{xviii} Tillich, Dimensions, p. 7.
- ^{xix} Ibid., p. 11.
- ^{xx} Ibid., p. 11.
- ^{xxi} Paul Tillich, 1957, Three Lectures/Discussions on the occasion of the publication of Volume II, "SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY". bMS 649/39 (1), p. 13.
- ^{xxii} Paul Tillich, 1976, *Systematic Theology III*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 400.
- ^{xxiii} See Agamben, Potentialities, p. 179.
- ^{xxiv} Paul Tillich, n.d., The Problem of Evil. Lecture III. The Divine and the Demonic. bMS 649/41 (14), p. 2.
- ^{xxv} Ibid., p. 9.
- ^{xxvi} Paul Tillich, 1960, Question and answer sessions with Peter John, February-March 1960. bMS 649/39 (2), March 15, p. 1.
- ^{xxvii} Tillich, Three Lectures, p. 18.
- ^{xxviii} Ibid., p. 19.
- ^{xxix} Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 403.
- ^{xxx} Ibid., p. 408
- ^{xxxi} Tillich, The Doctrine of the Spirit. Lecture III, p. 2.
- ^{xxxii} Paul Tillich, 1964, That They May Have Life. bMS 649/84 (13), p. 2.
- ^{xxxiii} See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 125.
- ^{xxxiv} Tillich, The Problem of Evil, p. 13.
- ^{xxxv} Ibid., pp. 13f.
- ^{xxxvi} Paul Tillich, 1955, The Spiritual and Theological Foundations of Pastoral Care. bMS 649/82 (9), p. 5.
- ^{xxxvii} Paul Tillich, 1960, The Impact of Pastoral Theology on Theological Thought. bMS 649/83 (4), pp. 1ff.
- ^{xxxviii} Tillich, Dimensions, p. 11.
- ^{xxxix} Tillich, The Impact, p. 11.

^{xl} Paul Tillich, 1957/1959, *Is a Science of Human Values Possible?* bMS 649/82 (13), p. 6.

^{xli} *Ibid.*, p. 6.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*

^{xliii} *Ibid.*, p. 8.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, p. 9.

^{xlvii} *Ibid.*

^{xlviii} *Ibid.*

^{xliv} See Giorgio Agamben, 2015, *The Use of Bodies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.