

Brief historical cross-section of epidemiology and statistics – Paul Johannes Tillich

Walter M. Fontanini, Mphil, MTheo, MLaw

Semmelweis University, Doctoral School of Mental Health Sciences

fontanini.walter@phd.semmelweis.hu

Initially submitted July 05, 2024; accepted for publication Sept.5.2024

Abstract

This study contains two main parts. The first one presents the German historical context of Tillich's work, paving the way for a more comprehensive appreciation of his theological and philosophical contributions. The second one investigates the central topic of fundamental human fears as investigated in his groundbreaking book. This analysis dissects the precise forms of anxiety that are creating these fears. The conclusion outlines potential avenues for future research, discovering how theology, psychology, and ethics intersect to provide insights into the experiences of elderly individuals. There is paid specific attention to the role of these disciplines as they facilitate coping with anxiety and encouraging courage in later life.

This study traces the intellectual journey of Paul Tillich, while focusing on his central role in the emerging existential psychology. It presents a historical perspective of Tillich's German roots, later on it discusses his interrelations with key figures such as Mannheim, Horkheimer, Adorno, Heidegger, and his move to the US, where he influenced Rollo May and the development of existentialist psychology. The core of this study explores Tillich's "The Courage to Be" and juxtaposes it with May's "The Meaning of Anxiety" and "The Courage to Create", suggesting a collective interpretation. The study also highlights Tillich's influence on figures such as Martin Luther King Jr.. Its conclusion outlines possible avenues of research in existential psychology, gerontology, and the interplay between theology and psychology.

Keywords: Paul Tillich, Existential Psychology, Rollo May, "The Courage to Be", Anxiety, Creation, Yalom

"Few men in our time have so captured the essence of our culture and the problem of mankind so well as Paul Tillich. He helped us to speak of God's action in history in terms which adequately expressed both the faith and the intellect of modern man. His Christian existentialism gave us a system of meaning and purpose for our lives in an age when war and doubt seriously threatened all that we had come to hold dear"

(Martin Luther King Jr,

Statement on the death of Paul Tillich. October 1965).

The German Lutheran theologian, Paul Johannes Tillich (1886-1965),¹ is widely acclaimed for his exceptional integration of Christian doctrine and existential philosophy.

¹ If the reader wishes to explore the topic in greater detail, another paper can be found at Fontanini, W. (2024). *Paul Tillich and the Genesis of Existential Psychology*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11524814>, offering further insights into the historical timeline, the Frankfurt School, the Kairos Group, and the origins of The Socialist Decision.

As a distinguished scholar in theological circles, Tillich's profound insights and existential exploration of the human predicament, particularly his groundbreaking concept of the "God above God," have played a crucial role in shaping contemporary theological thinking; his systematic methodology presents a convincing comprehension of the divine that caters to the essential issues facing the modern-day world.

But there are some lesser known dimensions where Paul Tillich is prominent.

Tillich as social ethicist

Although less prominent, Tillich's ideas on religious socialism hold great significance among scholars and thinkers, particularly within the fields of social ethics and political theology. His belief was that Christian principles and socialist ideals could be fused together to establish a fair and benevolent society, rooted in the spiritual essence of Christianity, whilst encouraging the economic and societal reforms advocated by socialism.

His views on religious socialism are intertwined within his broader theological project, which aimed to reconcile faith with the prevailing socio-political circumstances. He contended that socialism, anchored by the metamorphic potential of religious principles, can tackle the existential apprehensions and socio-economic disparities that afflict contemporary societies.

Tillich has made an indelible impact on theological and political discourse through his articulation of a society where religious depth and socialist principles combine. His insights remain relevant to those navigating the complexities of faith in action, social justice, and the pursuit of a socio-political order that reflects religion's ethical imperatives. This facet of his work, whilst not attaining the same public recognition as his strictly theological writings, is nonetheless a crucial element of his intellectual legacy and continues to be examined and respected in academic circles.

Tillich as a psychologist of religion

Amidst

1. the towering achievements of Tillich's extensive **theological work**
2. and his significant contributions to the discourse on **religious socialism**

lies a lesser-known yet invaluable gem: a succinct volume that delves into the very essence of the human condition entitled "*The Courage to Be*" (1952).

This concise work marks a departure from Tillich's previous explorations of political theology and systematic theology. It prompts an inquiry into the motivations underlying its creation. Here, in this condensed treatise, Tillich focuses inward and delves into the inner fears and existential anxieties that afflict the human spirit.

What prompted Tillich to write this particular piece, which diverges from his usual contributions? To answer this, we must delve deeper into the context and factors that may have influenced Tillich during this stage of his intellectual development.

Did it signal a significant shift or was it simply a moment of reflection that prompted him to explore the existential dimensions of fear and anxiety, issues that may have required urgent attention outside the broader context of his customary theological and political discourse?

By pinpointing a deficiency in the scholarly conversation surrounding existential psychology, this paper presents a crucial research query (RQ1):

Could Paul Tillich's contributions be viewed as a progression of the intellectual path pioneered by Rollo May? This inquiry emerges notably when considering Tillich's parallel themes with his student and friend May's groundbreaking "The Meaning of Anxiety" (1950), followed by Tillich's "The Courage to Be" (1952) and May's further elaborations in "Man's search for himself" (1953) and later "The Courage to Create" (1975). In a similar way, "Love, Power and Justice" (Tillich, 1954) will be followed by "Love and Will" (May, 1969). This perspective offers a potential bridge between their works, suggesting that Tillich may have expanded upon and continued the discourse initiated by May and later May took up Tillich's work to pinpoint certain concepts. The first from a philosophical-theological point of view, the latter from a more psychological perspective.

This chain of scholarly works suggests a possible intellectual dialogue between the two thinkers and friends, with Tillich's interjection potentially expanding the conceptual gap of the first book and May completing Tillich's work, after his death. My research aims to delve into the nuances of this relationship, examining the extent to which Tillich's writings may have been influenced by May's explorations of anxiety and creativity, and vice versa, and how these interlinked themes have evolved within their respective bodies of work.

The scope of this current article does not extend to the breadth of future research, which will be explored in depth in a subsequent publication.

To delve into this complex relationship, this article turns to the pioneering work of philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, who introduced the concept of the "**Absolute Anxieties**," offering an exclusive perspective.

In particular, in his book "*The Courage to Be*", he identifies three absolute and three relative anxieties, related to different fears. In particular:

1. **Natural Anxiety from the Fear of Death (Nonbeing):** This is the most fundamental of all fears. It is the fear of annihilation, of ceasing to exist. Tillich argues that this fear underlies many other anxieties and is central to the human condition. This anxiety can manifest as a fear of death, illness, or other forms of existential threat.

2. **Moral Anxiety from the Fear of Meaninglessness:** This fear is related to the existential question of whether life has any ultimate meaning or purpose. It involves anxiety about the lack of significance or value in one's existence.

3. **Spiritual anxiety from the Fear of Guilt and Condemnation:** This fear is linked to moral and ethical concerns. It involves anxiety about being judged, condemned, or found guilty by oneself, others, or a higher moral authority.

Tillich argues that these anxieties are inherent aspects of the human condition, and they can manifest in various ways throughout our lives. He suggests that embracing courage is essential in facing and transcending these anxieties, allowing us to live authentically and find meaning in the face of existential challenges. In his work, he defines courage as the self-affirmation of one's being in spite of a threat of nonbeing. He relates courage to anxiety, being anxiety the threat of non-being and the courage to be what we use to combat that threat.

By understanding and exploring these types of anxieties, individuals can develop a deeper awareness of their own fears and struggles, and work towards a more courageous and authentic way of being in the world.

Tillich's book emerges as a pivotal text that captures the essential elements of the human journey, offering comfort and insight. It transcends the academic rigour of his earlier writings and offers a deeply personal compass for those grappling with the intricacies of identity and the nature of courage. In its pages, Tillich presents his theological insights with incisive power, eloquently describing faith as a profound commitment to our deepest concerns and positing courage as the gateway to understanding our true existence, asserting that **“Courage reveals the true nature of Being”**.

The German philosopher explores existential themes, such as the essence of absolute fears and the turmoil of pathological anxiety. He delves into the concept of anxiety through an existential lens, drawing on the philosophical insights of Søren Kierkegaard and the psychological viewpoints of contemporaries like Richard Niebuhr and Rollo May. This book garnered notable attention, like a kind of “Von Restorff effect”, the well-known psychological phenomenon, also referred to as the “isolation effect,” that suggests that within a group of similar items, the one that markedly differs stands out and is thus more memorable.

With its unique approach to the subject matter of human anxiety and courage, it distinguished itself amidst a sea of homogeneous theological discussions, securing a lasting place in the collective memory of both scholars and lay readers. It's this distinctive quality that has rendered Tillich's work a classic, ensuring that his explorations into the human condition continue to resonate and influence thought across various disciplines.

Tillich as systematic Theologian, the years of maturity

Subsequently, he composed a comprehensive three-volume work, *Systematic Theology*, which delved into the complexities of existentialist thought; this three-volume magnum opus represents a monumental contribution to 20th-century theological thought. Published between 1950 and 1963, these volumes articulate Tillich's innovative approach to Christian theology through the lens of existentialist philosophy. These books are not just scholarly work but a creative synthesis that attempts to bridge the gap between the depth of religious tradition and the breadth of modern secular thought.

During his lifetime, the ideas of Paul Tillich attracted the scholarly attention of many distinguished academics, like Rollo May and Irvin Yalom and others. Among these, Martin Luther King Jr. stands out for his prominence, dedicating his doctoral dissertation to an analysis of Tillich's work.

The 19th century's industrialisation exacerbated social conflicts, leading many workers to distance themselves from the Church, which they saw as aligned with the ruling elite. In response, theologians like Paul Tillich sought to reconcile Christian ethics with socialist ideals, arguing that the Gospel's teachings aligned with socialism's push for a just society. Tillich, a leading figure in religious socialism, viewed the Sermon on the Mount as a foundation for supporting socialist movements, advocating for the integration of Christian values into the labour movement.

Tillich's involvement in the religious socialist movement deepened after World War I, where his experience as a military chaplain exposed him to the destructive effects of capitalism and militarism. He actively engaged with Marxist thought, critically supporting Marx's analysis of capitalism while rejecting dogmatic Marxism. His 1932 book *The Socialist Decision* underscored the necessity of socialism but was banned by the Nazis due to its critique of their regime.

Central to Tillich's thought was the concept of *kairos*, which he used to describe critical moments in history when divine truths intersect with human action. He believed that the post-World War I era presented such a moment for religious socialism. However, he warned against the dangers of misinterpreting these moments, referencing how the Nazis manipulated the idea of *kairos* to justify their regime.

Tillich's tenure in Frankfurt was brief, ending after just four years when, on April 13, 1933, he was relieved of his duties as a professor. With Hitler's ascent to Chancellor, Tillich was the first non-Jewish professor prohibited from teaching, followed by Mannheim Károly and Horkheimer. His work "*Die Sozialistische Entscheidung*" faced immediate censure and destruction earlier that year, but in the summer of 1933 Reinhold Niebuhr (New York), who had known Tillich since 1919, invited him to the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Tillich moved to the US with his wife on the 4th of November 1933.

Tillich departed Germany with the hope of a swift return to a professorship in Berlin. However, this hope was soon dashed as he was officially dismissed from his German public service role not long after his move to the United States (Graf 2017, 11).

Tillich in the US

Arriving in the US, Rollo May², a young seminarian, was appointed as his English tutor and also assisted him in securing residency and eventually citizenship in the United States. He grew to be one of his closest friends.

Rollo May

"I'm not afraid to admire Paul Tillich. He has been my spiritual father. I learned from him and loved him. Strangely, that seems to enrage many people." (May 1973)

Rollo May³ (1909-1994) completed his undergraduate degree in English in 1930. Following his fascination with ancient Greek culture and philosophy, he embarked on an

² My motivation to pen a brief section on Rollo May is twofold: Firstly, he was not only Paul Tillich's confidant but also the entrusted biographer, a role signifying profound mutual respect and intimate knowledge of Tillich's life and thoughts. Secondly, the intellectual interplay between the two men arguably catalysed a pivotal shift in Tillich's scholarly pursuits. This cultural and intellectual exchange may well be the most significant factor behind Tillich's transition from a focus on the theology of history to a theology deeply intertwined with psychology, a shift that played a substantial role in shaping the later success of Tillich's career.

³ "The second-oldest of six children, Rollo May was born in 1909 in Ada, Ohio, a small town in the Midwest, and grew up in another small Midwestern town called Marine City, Michigan. After graduating from Oberlin College, he attended brief seminars with Alfred Adler in Austria and then obtained a divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1938. There the theologian Paul Tillich became his mentor. After a brief, unsatisfying stint as a Protestant minister, May embarked on a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Columbia University with psychoanalytic training at the William Allan White Institute. His 1949 dissertation on anxiety

www.kaleidoscopehistory.hu

Walter M. Fontanini, Mphil, MTheo, MLaw

educational journey to Thessaloniki, Greece, where he accepted a position as an English instructor at the Christian institution “Anatolia College”. His time in Greece opened avenues to frequent travels across Europe and Austria in particular, where - rejecting Freud's deterministic perspective, so laying the groundwork for what would eventually be recognized as “existential psychology” - he engaged with prominent non-Freudian psychologists and psychoanalysts, including Carl Jung, Fromm and Alfred Adler.

His intellectual curiosity led him to attend Adler's seminars in Vienna during the summers of 1932 and 1933, which significantly influenced his burgeoning interest in personality development and counselling—themes that would later permeate his early publications.

May's return to the United States in 1933 marked the beginning of a new chapter as he entered Union Theological Seminary in New York. It was here that he encountered Paul Tillich, who became not only a pivotal mentor to May, influencing his academic and professional path, but also a close personal friend.

In a role reversal, May became his English teacher and assisted the theologian and his family in navigating the complexities of U.S. immigration and ultimately obtaining American citizenship. This period was foundational for May, intertwining his educational pursuits with meaningful personal relationships and setting the stage for his later contributions to psychology and theology.

Upon completing his theological studies, he briefly served as a pastor in a small New Jersey congregation, an experience that ultimately proved unfulfilling. Seeking a different path, he left his clerical position in 1940 to pursue a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology at Columbia University. Throughout the war years, as he juggled the responsibilities of being a father to three children, working as an adjunct instructor, and teaching night classes, the cumulative physical and emotional strain began to weigh heavily on him.

Stricken with tuberculosis, May spent 1943-1944 in a sanatorium, an experience that profoundly influenced his intellectual and personal trajectory. During extended bed rest, he immersed himself in existential literature, including the works of Kierkegaard, introduced to him by Tillich. This period of convalescence became transformative, prompting deep reflections on the **Fear of Death** and the related anxiety, observations that were sharpened by the presence of fellow patients in the sanatorium grappling with their mortality.

During his time in the sanatorium, May began to conceptualise what he would later term the “**Fundamental fears.**” These are the deep-seated existential anxieties that underpin the human experience, fears that are not merely about specific threats but are tied to the core of our being.

became his third book and attracted wide interest. For nearly the next three decades, May was a Manhattan-based psychotherapist, prolific writer, and intermittent academician. His book *Love and Will* became a bestseller in 1969. May moved to the San Francisco area several years later, where he continued to write, train graduate students as clinicians, and lecture widely.

May also still conducted psychotherapy. Among his favourite therapeutic questions was: “What is going on with you now at the deepest level that you can get a hold of?” It's a key question for all of us, and one sure to catalyse personal growth.” from his official website, www.rollomay.net, as seen on the 7th of November 2023

www.kaleidoscopehistory.hu

Walter M. Fontanini, Mphil, MTheo, MLaw

When back in New York, proved by this experience and guided by Tillich's mentorship, May dedicated his dissertation to exploring the essence of anxiety. Tillich became his PhD Supervisor. He successfully earned his diploma in 1949, and his significant dissertation, "**The Meaning of Anxiety**", was subsequently published, as "Publication Honors", as a scholarly book in 1950⁴.

In his book he wrote that anxiety is not a mere psychological symptom, but an existential human condition. He examines the role of anxiety in **personal and creative development**, differentiating between **normal and neurotic anxiety**. He draws on the ideas of existential philosophers and psychologists to argue that facing and **embracing anxiety can lead to personal growth and strength**.

May's reflections led him to identify various dimensions of these fundamental fears, such as **the dread of nonexistence** that comes with the **fear of death**, the anxiety of **isolation** in the face of our need for connection, and the **fear of loss of autonomy or the dread of meaninglessness**.

Surprisingly, all these concepts will sound familiar to Tillich's readers.

This formative period allowed May to lay the groundwork for his future work in existential psychology, where he explored the impact of these fundamental fears on human behaviour, personality development, and psychotherapy.

In his book, the author examines the role of anxiety in personal and creative development, differentiating between normal and neurotic anxiety. He draws on the ideas of existential philosophers and psychologists to argue that facing and embracing anxiety can lead to personal growth and strength. His work is considered a cornerstone in existential psychology, providing deep insights into how anxiety influences behaviour and personality.

It should be noted that many of these themes and concepts, if not all of them, here drafted psychologically, are elaborated upon in Tillich's subsequent work, "*The Courage to Be*", where he introduces a new dimension to the discussion: the spiritual aspect.

⁴ Anxiety is not a mere psychological symptom, but a fundamental human condition. His work is considered a cornerstone in existential psychology, providing deep insights into how anxiety influences behaviour and personality.

"Dr. Rollo May brings order and lucidity to the problematic subject of anxiety. Examining the various theories of anxiety, he views them in their cultural and historical as well as biological and psychological dimensions. He then seeks the common denominators in these theories, assesses points of disagreement, and, as far as possible, synthesises the various viewpoints into a comprehensive theory of anxiety. Dr. May challenges the current belief that "mental health is living without anxiety" and asserts that anxiety is essential to the human condition, that confrontation with anxiety can relieve us from boredom, sharpen our sensitivity, and create the tension that is necessary to preserve human existence. Throughout this . . . work there runs the motif of anxiety in relation to intelligence, creativity, and originality. Dr. May focuses on destructive and constructive ways of dealing with anxiety. Not only can anxiety paralyse, he tells us, but it can be the impetus for our most positive change, for it is only by confronting and coping with anxiety that self-realisation occurs. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)"

In 1957, Irvin Yalom⁵ (Serlin 1994), underwent therapy with Rollo May while completing his psychiatry residency at Johns Hopkins, a process that was probably an integral part of his professional development and training. Yalom went on to become a prominent figure in existential psychology.

Also his extensive work in the field will focus on “the four fundamental fears” that define the human experience:

1. **Death,**
2. **Freedom,**
3. **Isolation (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential), and**
4. **Meaninglessness.**

He explores the human response to these existential issues, examining both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms, as anxieties.

It's worth noting that Rollo May faced the delicate task of defending Paul Tillich's legacy against allegations made by Tillich's wife, Hannah. After Tillich passed away, Hannah published a *memoir*⁶ (Tillich H., 1973) wherein she depicted him in a controversial light, including allegations of infidelity⁷ and describing him as a woman chaser, more committed to seducing female students than to writing books on theology. In response, Rollo May felt compelled to write a fervent article (Wright, 1974) countering this portrayal and upholding Tillich's scholarly and personal reputation.

The Courage to Be

Allow me a brief preface to clarify the most recurrent terms in this book: fear and anxiety.

As indicated by Gullone (2000), **normal fear** is defined as a natural response to a real or imagined threat. It's considered to be an integral and adaptive aspect of human development, serving primarily to promote survival. In contrast, **anxiety** is often future-oriented and focused on diffuse threats. It involves a more complex response system, including cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioural aspects, and is geared towards preparation for anticipated events.

Normal anxiety⁸ may vary according to factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status and culture, and tends to decrease in prevalence and intensity with age. The content of normal anxiety also changes over time, evolving from immediate, concrete stimuli in infancy to more anticipatory, abstract fears in late childhood and adolescence (“Will I be fortunate

⁵ Irvin David Yalom (1931) is an American existential psychiatrist who is emeritus professor of psychiatry at Stanford University.

⁶ The Tillich Society in Germany issued a “warning” to German publishers not to issue any translation of Mrs. Tillich's book, which the society said contains “weighty distortions” and “misrepresentations” of Tillich.

⁷ “It saddens me to say this, but I must speak out: I don't think Hannah's book presents an accurate picture of Paulus,” May declared. “It presents him as a kind of adolescent voyeur and implies there were actual sexual relationships between him and a long series of women. That's not true.”

⁸ Pennsylvania State University. (n.d.). Psychology of human emotion. Retrieved December 7, 2023, from <https://psu.pb.unizin.org/psychologyofhumanemotion/>

enough to find my ideal partner, and will we have a harmonious family life with children? What if not?”. This question is an example of a future-oriented fear that creates anxiety now.).

If we imagine an African child who has to walk from one village to another in the savannah, knowing that there are lions and snakes in that part of the territory, he will experience anxiety and this state will make him predictably more cautious. If he meets a real lion, the anxiety will disappear and be transformed into fear. Normal anxiety, to some extent, is a natural and universal part of the human experience.

A **pathological fear** occurs when I'm worried about something concrete, like lions and snakes, but in an exaggerated way, not about the object itself (a bigger lion), but about the circumstances: like being afraid of lions not on the savannah, but in the North Pole. In other words, an imaginary situation produces a complex reaction that has nothing to do with reality.

Pathological fear is typically a response to a specific, identifiable threat. It involves immediate, concrete responses to danger and is often characterised by acute behavioural and physiological reactions.

Pathological anxiety, on the other hand, is conceptualised as an exaggerated state of mind. It is often a response to a non-targeted, non-specific, protracted or perceived threat rather than an immediate danger. In contrast to the specific and acute response of pathological fear, pathological anxiety is characterised by prolonged, diffuse and often anticipatory responses to potential threats.

Paul Tillich was probably unaware of neurophysiological explanations, but in his book he makes the same specification.

- Anxiety is without a concrete object
- Fear has an object
- I can only fight my fear with courage if it is objectified.

Please keep these points in mind as you read the next paragraph.

The Courage To be

The Courage to Be has become a classic of twentieth-century religious and philosophical thought. The Christian existentialist thinker describes the dilemma of modern man and points a way to the conquest of the problem of anxiety.

The essential character of courage is “in spite of.”

In his theology, courage is a central concept. Courage is not just a human virtue but a fundamental aspect of human existence. It is the ability to affirm one's being in spite of the elements of nonbeing that threaten it, such as doubt, despair, and death.

Tillich describes several types of courage.

1. The "**courage to be as oneself**" reflects the individual's assertion of their own uniqueness and identity in the face of conformist pressures.
2. The "**courage to be as a part**" represents the courage to affirm one's place within a community or group, acknowledging interdependence.
3. Lastly, "**the courage to be as being**" refers to the deeper existential courage that confronts the "anxiety of meaninglessness and nonbeing" by finding a sense of ultimate concern or meaning, which for many is rooted in faith or a transcendent reality.

In summary, courage is the existential and spiritual affirmation of life against the forces that negate it, and it is intimately connected to the concept of faith.

This faith aligns with the idea of a **“God above God”**, reflecting the introspective aspect of faith as an unveiling of consciousness's core structure, a theme present since his early works. This phrase is one of Paul Tillich's most provocative theological concepts. It appears in his work *"The Courage to Be,"* where he addresses the existential anxieties of modern life. This concept arises from Tillich's attempt to reconcile the idea of God with the existentialist philosophy that emphasises the individual's experience of alienation and meaninglessness.

For Tillich, this concept represents the ultimate source of being and meaning that transcends traditional theistic conceptions of God. It is an acknowledgment of the limitations of human understanding of the divine, pointing to a reality of God that goes beyond the anthropomorphic depictions or doctrinal formulations found in institutional religion.

In particular, this idea is Tillich's response to the existentialist critique of religion, which often views God as a projection of human concerns and thus irrelevant in a secular, scientific age. Tillich suggests that while the traditional image of God may indeed be a human construct that is subject to doubt and disbelief, there is a deeper dimension of the divine that escapes these critiques. This motto thus signifies a divine reality that is not an object among objects but the very ground of existence itself, the basis of the possibility of any being or meaning. In this sense, Tillich's God is not one being among others but the depth of being that underlies and surpasses all finite existence. It is this understanding of God that can provide the courage to be in the face of non-being, despair, and the anxieties of life. For Tillich, then, true faith is an act of ultimate concern directed toward this "God above God," which provides a foundation for meaning in the face of life's ultimate concerns.

Tillich expanded his Yale University lectures into this book, where he incorporates the early philosophies of Socrates, Aquinas, and Nietzsche into his own philosophies about courage. Tillich believes that "courage is directly tied to being or a self-affirmation of one's being". In particular, he defines courage as the self-affirmation of one's being in spite of a threat of non-being. He relates courage to anxiety⁹, anxiety being the threat of non-being and the courage to be what we use to combat that threat.

In order to explain how courage is connected to a personal being, Tillich also explains the metaphysical concept of "Nonbeing", saying that being embraces both itself and its negation, adding that being is eternally overcoming nonbeing.

⁹ "There are slight but significant differences in Reinhold Niebuhr's and Tillich's respective use of this account of anxiety as well, despite the fact that both stems from their common reliance on Søren Kierkegaard's account of anxiety. This is especially evident when one considers their account of a related theological concern: the capacity for human self-transcendence. Accounting for these differences in their view on human self-transcendence illustrates how and why more pronounced differences exist in their respective accounts of the relationship of love and justice tempered by hope, as found in Christian Realism (for Niebuhr) and the fulfilment of time as *kairos* in Faithful Realism (for Tillich)", (Pryor A., 2021, 163).

Tillich delves into metaphysical concepts of Being and Nonbeing, leading to a crucial discussion in his book: **the lack of belief in one's personal being results in anxiety**.

Then, he discusses three absolute fears and three relative fears as part of his exploration of anxiety and the human condition. These fears are central to his existential philosophy:

Three Absolute Anxieties:

1. **Anxiety of Death (Nonbeing):** This is the most fundamental of all fears. It is the fear of annihilation, of ceasing to exist. Tillich argues that this fear underlies many other anxieties and is central to the human condition.
2. **Anxiety of Meaninglessness:** This fear is related to the existential question of whether life has any ultimate meaning or purpose. It involves anxiety about the lack of significance or value in one's existence.
3. **Anxiety of Guilt and Condemnation:** This fear is linked to moral and ethical concerns. It involves anxiety about being judged, condemned, or found guilty, either by oneself, others, or a higher moral authority.

and the Three Relative Anxieties:

1. **Anxiety of Fate:** While the fear of death is an absolute fear, the fear of fate is more specific. It relates to anxieties about the unpredictability and uncontrollability of life events, including accidents, illnesses, and the uncertain future.
2. **Anxiety of the Power of Being Itself:** This fear involves anxiety about the overwhelming and uncontrollable aspects of existence. It's related to a sense of awe and dread in the face of the immense power of being or reality.
3. **Anxiety of God:** In Tillich's theological context, this fear is not about fearing God's love but rather about fearing the mystery and transcendence of the divine. It involves awe and reverence for the ultimate reality that is God.

Tillich's work explores how these fears are interconnected and how they can lead to existential anxiety. He also discusses the concept of "courage" as the means by which individuals confront and transcend these fears to find meaning and purpose in life.

The German theologian asserts that "courage is self-affirmation in spite of anxiety." He then addresses **anxiety as the recognition of potential nonbeing**, which threatens existence in three distinct ways, each correlating with a form of anxiety, categorising existential anxiety into three forms:

1. As related to fate and death, acknowledging that life is subject to unpredictable factors and the inevitability of death.
2. As stemming from emptiness and meaninglessness, which emerges when life's purpose becomes unclear, often leading to doubt and despair.
3. Or associated with guilt and condemnation, fueled by the sense of not achieving one's potential.

In the critical third chapter, Tillich embarks on a thorough explanation of what he labels as neurotic or pathological anxiety, setting it apart from the existential variety he has discussed prior. Neurotic anxiety is characterised as contingent, tethered to particular life circumstances, unlike existential anxiety, which emanates from the broader human condition itself: such anxiety manifests within individuals who, in their efforts to dodge the confrontations of existential anxiety, find themselves ensnared in a web of unresolved internal conflicts. These conflicts might span from the clash between conscious censorship and unconscious impulses to the discord between lofty ambitions and the sobering reality of human limitations.

The book argues that psychological intervention alone is insufficient to define or address the full spectrum of anxiety. A turn to ontology is essential, providing a framework that situates the psychological and sociological data within an all-encompassing theory of anxiety.

Pathological anxiety, in Tillich's view, is but a specific manifestation of existential anxiety, the intensity and impact of which depends on the interplay between the anxiety itself and the individual's capacity for self-affirmation and courage.

He had earlier established the notion that **while courage cannot eradicate anxiety - due to its existential nature - it can envelop it**, integrating anxiety into the very act of self-affirmation.

In this way, anxiety, when acknowledged and faced "in spite of" the fears it presents, is transformed. It becomes a component of courage, echoing the philosophical idea that being naturally assimilates nonbeing.

This incorporation, this acceptance of anxiety despite its intimidating presence, is what transmutes mere self-affirmation into the noble virtue of courage.

Understanding pathological anxiety is pivotal, and it hinges on confronting one's potential non-being with courage. A failure to do so often leads to despair.

In an attempt to escape this despair, individuals may retreat into neurosis. Neurotics, in their own way, seek self-affirmation; yet, this assertion is inherently flawed as they have forfeited part of their identity, leading to a restricted and defensive sense of self.

This self-preservation manifests as a fortress of denial, safeguarded against the incursions of reality and psychoanalytic scrutiny. Such defences, while instinctual, betray an awareness that their collapse would leave only despair. Neurosis, then, is an ailment in need of remedy for one to reconnect with reality.

An average person succumbs to neurosis when they substitute their fragmented but courageously embraced reality with a delusion where fears are subdued, leading to a pathological form of self-affirmation. This avoidance allows the ominous shadow of non-being to take hold, transforming them into ardent guardians of a self-imposed order, detached from reality and plagued by an underlying, often unrecognised anxiety. Thus, it is anxiety that, when not integrated into one's courageous self-affirmation, festers into neurosis.

In his view, courage is the active embrace of self despite the pervasive dread of non-existence. It involves integrating the very anxiety that threatens to undermine one's being.

Pathological anxiety, however, represents a retreat from this confrontation, as those afflicted attempt to escape anxiety and, consequently, life itself.

Unlike existentialist thinkers such as Sartre, Camus, and Kafka, who articulate the despair of life's apparent meaninglessness, Tillich does not settle on a human-centric resolution. In his concluding chapter, he turns to Christian motifs, advocating that overcoming the despair of meaninglessness hinges on transcending human capabilities and depending on a divine source of power.

Conclusion

While the brevity of this article precludes a more detailed exploration, it concludes by suggesting several promising directions for further research. Specifically, within the domain of gerontology, potential research avenues could include examining how ageing individuals with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) or dementia might benefit from the existential psychological principles discussed by Tillich and May.

1. **Existential Anxiety and Fear of Mutilation:** Tillich's work delves into existential anxiety, which is the anxiety that arises from the human condition and the awareness of our mortality. Dementia patients, as they grapple with memory loss and cognitive decline, might also experience existential anxiety as they lose their sense of self and struggle to make sense of their changing reality.
2. **Loss of Identity and the Fear of Annihilation:** "The Courage to Be" discusses the importance of maintaining a sense of self despite life's challenges. In dementia, individuals often experience a loss of identity as they forget who they are, their life history, and even their loved ones. This can lead to profound existential distress.
3. **Meaning-Making:** Tillich emphasises the role of meaning-making in confronting anxiety. Dementia patients may grapple with the loss of meaning in their lives as they lose the ability to engage in activities that once brought them fulfilment. Exploring how they cope with this loss of meaning could be a significant area of research.
4. **Support and Coping Strategies in MCI and Dementia:** Tillich's work suggests that courage can be found in facing anxiety and uncertainty. Research could investigate the coping strategies that dementia patients use to confront their anxiety and how external support systems, such as caregivers and therapeutic interventions, can foster courage in the face of dementia-related anxiety.
5. **Spirituality and Transcendence:** Tillich's theology often involves themes of spirituality and transcendence. Research could explore whether spiritual practices or beliefs play a role in helping dementia patients navigate their anxiety and find a sense of courage and peace.

In conclusion, this article explores the intellectual landscape of Paul Tillich's life, from his turbulent German origins during times of revolution and war, to his academic associations with luminaries such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Heidegger. It traces his voyage to America, his significant alliance with Rollo May, and the rise of existential psychology, highlighting Irvin Yalom's contributions to its evolution. A thorough examination of Tillich's "The Courage to Be" has uncovered a plausible synergistic connection with May's "The Meaning of Anxiety" and "The Courage to Create," urging readers to contemplate these works in unison.

Collectively, they provide a composite perspective to comprehend the existential difficulties and the everlasting pursuit of significance in the human encounter.

“The Courage to Be is the Courage to accept oneself, in spite of being unacceptable”

References

ADORNO, Theodor: *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch*. Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967.

AVIS, Paul D. L.: In the Shadow of Frankfurt School: From Critical Theory to Critical Theology. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 35 (6), 529-540, 1982.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600055514>

BUESS, Richard and Urs MATTMÜLLER: *Prophetic Socialism*. Lucerne, Blumhardt - Ragaz - Barth, 1986.

CHAMPION, John W.: Tillich and the Frankfurt School: Parallels and Differences in Prophetic Criticism. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 69 (4), 512-530, 1986. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41178396>

GRAF, Friedrich W.: Paul Tillich im Exil. In: Christian DANZ and Wilhelm SCHÜßLER, eds., *Paul Tillich im Exil*. Berlin/Boston, 2017.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110552195-003>

GULLONE, Eleonora: The Development of Normal Fear: A Century of Research. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 20(4): 429-51, June 2000. DOI: 10.1016/s0272-7358(99)00034-3.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358\(99\)00034-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(99)00034-3)

HART, Curtis: Paul Tillich and Psychoanalysis. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 50, 646-55, 2009. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-009-9302-6.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-009-9302-6>

HORKHEIMER, Max: Ein neuer Ideologiebegriff? In *his Sozialphilosophische Studien: Aufsätze, Reden und Vorträge 1930-1972*, ed. Werner BREDE. Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1981, pp. 13-32.

KIERKEGAARD, Søren: The Concept of Anxiety. In Robert THOMTE, ed., *Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII, Volume 8: Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Princeton University Press, 1981.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400846979>

KING, Martin L.: A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman. Retrieved from

http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol02Scans/339_15-April-1955_A%20Comparison%20of%20the%20Conceptions%20of%20God.pdf, 1955.

KING, Martin L.: The Negro Is Your Brother. *Atlantic Monthly*, 212, 78-81; 86-88, 1963.

KING, Martin L.: Statement on the Death of Paul Tillich. MLKJP-GAMK (Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers, 1950-1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, Ga.), 1965.

LUKÁCS, György: *The Theory of the Novel*. MIT Press, 1971, p. 22.

MANNHEIM, Karl: *Ideology and Utopia*. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1936.

MAY, Rollo: *Paulus: Reminiscences of a Friendship*. Harper & Row, 1973.

MAY, Rollo: *The Meaning of Anxiety* (Rev. ed.). W. W. Norton, 1950.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/10760-000>

MAY, Rollo: *The Courage to Create*. W. W. Norton, 1975.

MACLEOD, Alistair: *Routledge Revivals: Paul Tillich, An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Theology* (1st ed.). Routledge, 1973.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315108315>

MESZAROS, James T.: A Participatory Individual: The Self in Paul Tillich. In: *Selfless Love and Human Flourishing in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs, 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198765868.003.0004>

MÜLLER, Richard A.: The Emmanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate: A Study in the Political Ramifications of Theology. *Consensus*, 18 (1), 1992. Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol18/iss1/18>

O'KEEFFE, Terence: Tillich et l'école de Francfort. *Études théologiques et religieuses*, 80(1), 71-80, 2005.
<https://doi.org/10.3917/etr.0801.0071>

PAUCK, Wilhelm and Marion PAUCK: *Paul Tillich: His Life & Thought*. Harper & Row, 1976.

PRYOR, Adam: Paul Tillich. In Robin LOVIN and Joshua MAULDIN, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Oxford Handbooks, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198813569.013.10>

PRÜFER, Stefan: Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen 1863-1890. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2002. Available at <https://books.google.de/books?id=BWNNkIudK5cC&pg=PA202> as seen on the 5th of November 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666351662>

REIMER, Alon J.: Theological Method and Political Ethics: The Paul Tillich-Emanuel Hirsch Debate. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 47(1), 135, March 1979. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLVII.1.135>

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLVII.1.135>

RICE, Daniel: Reinhold Niebuhr and His Circle of Influence. Cambridge University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139207737>

<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139207737>

ROSEN, Jerome B. and Jay SCHULKIN: From Normal Fear to Pathological Anxiety. Psychological Review, 105(2), 325-350, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.105.2.325>

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.105.2.325>

SCHARLEMANN, Robert P.: Totality: A Philosophical and Theological Problem Between Tillich and the Frankfurt School. Laval théologique et philosophique, 47(3), 329-341, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.7202/400626ar>

<https://doi.org/10.7202/400626ar>

SERLIN, Ilene: Remembering Rollo May: An Interview with Irvin Yalom. The Humanistic Psychologist, 22(3), 268-274, 1994.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08873267.1994.9976954>

STURM, Ernst: Vorlesungen über Geschichtsphilosophie und Sozialpädagogik: (Frankfurt 1929/30), Band 15, De Gruyter, 2007.

TILLICH, Hannah: From Time to Time. New York, Stein and Day, 1973. Available online at <https://archive.org/details/fromtimetotime0000till> as seen on the 8th of November 2023.

TILLICH, Paul: Class Struggle and Religious Socialism. In Carl Heinz RATSCHOW, ed., Paul Tillich: Hauptwerke in 6 Bänden, Band 3: Sozialphilosophische und ethische Schriften, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1998, p. 169. Quoted in Christine FREUND, Religious Socialism. Series of Publications of the Hamburg University of Economics and Politics, Volume 9/1995, pp. 1199-1203.

TILLICH, Paul: Die Sozialistische Entscheidung. In Die Sozialistische Aktion -- Heft 2. Schriftenreihe der neuen Blätter für den Sozialismus, Postdam, 1932. Available online at paultillich.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Paul-Tillich-Die-Sozialistische-Entscheidung.pdf

TILLICH, Paul: Grundlinien des Religiösen Sozialismus: Ein systematischer Entwurf. In Carl H. RATSCHOW, ed., Writings in the Social Philosophy and Ethics / Sozialphilosophische und ethische Schriften, Vol. 3/Band 3, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1998, pp. 103-130.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110884487-005>

TILLICH, Paul: Love, Power, and Justice. New York: Oxford University Press, 1954.

TILLICH, Paul: The Courage to Be. Yale University Press, 1952. Available online at The courage to be: Tillich, Paul, 1886-1965: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive, as seen on the 9th of November 2023.

TILLICH, Paul and Samuel STEINBERG: My Search for Absolutes. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1969.

WRIGHT, Edwin: Paul Tillich as Hero: An Interview with Rollo May. Christian Century, May 15, 1974, pp. 530-533.