

PAUL
TILLICH

THE
COURAGE
TO BE

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CHAPTER 1. *Being and Courage*

In agreement with the stipulation of the Terry Foundation that the lectures shall be concerned with "religion in the light of science and philosophy" I have chosen a concept in which theological, sociological, and philosophical problems converge, the concept of "courage." Few concepts are as useful for the analysis of the human situation. Courage is an ethical reality, but it is rooted in the whole breadth of human existence and ultimately in the structure of being itself. It must be considered ontologically in order to be understood ethically.

This becomes manifest in one of the earliest philosophical discussions of courage, in Plato's dialogue *Laches*. In the course of the dialogue several preliminary definitions are rejected. Then Nikias, the well-known general, tries again. As a military leader he should know what courage is and he should be able to define it. But his definition, like the others, proves to be inadequate. If courage, as he asserts, is the knowledge of "what is to be dreaded and what dared," then the question tends to become universal, for in order to answer it one must have "a knowledge concerning all goods and all evils under all circumstances" (199, C). But this definition contradicts the previous statement that courage is only a part of virtue. "Thus,"

Socrates concludes, "we have failed to discover what courage really is" (199, E). And this failure is quite serious within the frame of Socratic thinking. According to Socrates virtue is knowledge, and ignorance about what courage is makes any action in accordance with the true nature of courage impossible. But this Socratic failure is more important than most of the seemingly successful definitions of courage (even those of Plato himself and of Aristotle). For the failure to find a definition of courage as a virtue among other virtues reveals a basic problem of human existence. It shows that an understanding of courage presupposes an understanding of man and of his world, its structures and values. Only he who knows this knows what to affirm and what to negate. The ethical question of the nature of courage leads inescapably to the ontological question of the nature of being. And the procedure can be reversed. The ontological question of the nature of being can be asked as the ethical question of the nature of courage. Courage can show us what being is, and being can show us what courage is. Therefore the first chapter of this book is about "Being and Courage." Although there is no chance that I shall succeed where Socrates failed, the courage of risking an almost unavoidable failure may help to keep the Socratic problem alive.

COURAGE AND FORTITUDE: FROM PLATO TO THOMAS AQUINAS

The title of this book, *The Courage to Be*, unites both meanings of the concept of courage, the ethical and the

ontological. Courage as a human act, as a matter of valuation, is an ethical concept. Courage as the universal and essential self-affirmation of one's being is an ontological concept. The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.

Looking at the history of Western thought one finds the two meanings of courage indicated almost everywhere, explicitly or implicitly. Since we have to deal in separate chapters with the Stoic and Neo-Stoic ideas of courage I shall restrict myself at this point to the interpretation of courage in the line of thought which leads from Plato to Thomas Aquinas. In Plato's *Republic* courage is related to that element of the soul which is called *thymós* (the spirited, courageous element), and both are related to that level of society which is called *phýlakes* (guardians). *Thymós* lies between the intellectual and the sensual element in man. It is the unreflective striving toward what is noble. As such it has a central position in the structure of the soul, it bridges the cleavage between reason and desire. At least it could do so. Actually the main trend of Platonic thought and the tradition of Plato's school were dualistic, emphasizing the conflict between the reasonable and the sensual. The bridge was not used. As late as Descartes and Kant, the elimination of the "middle" of man's being (the *thymoeidés*) had ethical and ontological consequences. It was responsible for Kant's moral rigor and Descartes' division of being into thought and extension. The sociological context in which this de-

velopment occurred is well known. The Platonic phýlakes are the armed aristocracy, the representatives of what is noble and graceful. Out of them the bearers of wisdom arise, adding wisdom to courage. But this aristocracy and its values disintegrated. The later ancient world as well as the modern bourgeoisie have lost them; in their place appear the bearers of enlightened reason and technically organized and directed masses. But it is remarkable that Plato himself saw the thymoeidés as an essential function of man's being, an ethical value and sociological quality.

The aristocratic element in the doctrine of courage was preserved as well as restricted by Aristotle. The motive for withstanding pain and death courageously is, according to him, that it is noble to do so and base not to do so (Nic. Eth. iii. 9). The courageous man acts "for the sake of what is noble, for that is the aim of virtue" (iii. 7). "Noble," in these and other passages, is the translation of *kalós* and "base" the translation of *aischrós*, words which usually are rendered by "beautiful" and "ugly." A beautiful or noble deed is a deed to be praised. Courage does what is to be praised and rejects what is to be despised. One praises that in which a being fulfills its potentialities or actualizes its perfections. Courage is the affirmation of one's essential nature, one's inner aim or entelechy, but it is an affirmation which has in itself the character of "in spite of." It includes the possible and, in some cases, the unavoidable sacrifice of elements which also belong to one's being but which, if not sacrificed,

would prevent us from reaching our actual fulfillment. This sacrifice may include pleasure, happiness, even one's own existence. In any case it is praiseworthy, because in the act of courage the most essential part of our being prevails against the less essential. It is the beauty and goodness of courage that the good and the beautiful are actualized in it. Therefore it is noble.

Perfection for Aristotle (as well as for Plato) is realized in degrees, natural, personal, and social; and courage as the affirmation of one's essential being is more conspicuous in some of these degrees than in others. Since the greatest test of courage is the readiness to make the greatest sacrifice, the sacrifice of one's life, and since the soldier is required by his profession to be always ready for this sacrifice, the soldier's courage was and somehow remained the outstanding example of courage. The Greek word for courage, *andreía* (manliness) and the Latin word *fortitudo* (strength) indicate the military connotation of courage. As long as the aristocracy was the group which carried arms the aristocratic and the military connotations of courage merged. When the aristocratic tradition disintegrated and courage could be defined as the universal knowledge of what is good and evil, wisdom and courage converged and true courage became distinguished from the soldier's courage. The courage of the dying Socrates was rational-democratic, not heroic-aristocratic.

But the aristocratic line was revived in the early Middle Ages. Courage became again characteristic of nobility. The knight is he who represents courage as a soldier and as

a nobleman. He has what was called *hohe Mut*, the high, noble, and courageous spirit. The German language has two words for courageous, *tapfer* and *mutig*. *Tapfer* originally means firm, weighty, important, pointing to the power of being in the upper strata of feudal society. *Mutig* is derived from *Mut*, the movement of the soul suggested by the English word "mood." Thus words like *Schwer-mut*, *Hochmut*, *Kleinmut* (the heavy, the high, the small "spirit"). *Mut* is a matter of the "heart," the personal center. Therefore *mutig* can be rendered by *beherzt* (as the French-English "courage" is derived from the French *coeur*, heart). While *Mut* has preserved this larger sense, *Tapferkeit* became more and more the special virtue of the soldier—who ceased to be identical with the knight and the nobleman. It is obvious that the terms *Mut* and courage directly introduce the ontological question, while *Tapferkeit* and fortitude in their present meanings are without such connotations. The title of these lectures could not have been "The Fortitude to Be" (*Die Tapferkeit zum Sein*); it had to read "The Courage to Be" (*Der Mut zum Sein*). These linguistic remarks reveal the medieval situation with respect to the concept of courage, and with it the tension between the heroic-aristocratic ethics of the early Middle Ages on the one hand and on the other the rational-democratic ethics which are a heritage of the Christian-humanistic tradition and again came to the fore at the end of the Middle Ages.

This situation is classically expressed in Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of courage. Thomas realizes and discusses the

duality in the meaning of courage. Courage is strength of mind, capable of conquering whatever threatens the attainment of the highest good. It is united with wisdom, the virtue which represents the unity of the four cardinal virtues (the two others being temperance and justice). A keen analysis could show that the four are not of equal standing. Courage, united with wisdom, includes temperance in relation to oneself as well as justice in relation to others. The question then is whether courage or wisdom is the more comprehensive virtue. The answer is dependent on the outcome of the famous discussion about the priority of intellect or will in the essence of being, and consequently, in the human personality. Since Thomas decides unambiguously for the intellect, as a necessary consequence he subordinates courage to wisdom. A decision for the priority of the will would point to a greater, though not a total, independence of courage in its relation to wisdom. The difference between the two lines of thought is decisive for the valuation of "venturing courage" (in religious terms, the "risk of faith"). Under the dominance of wisdom courage is essentially the "strength of mind" which makes obedience to the dictates of reason (or revelation) possible, while venturing courage participates in the creation of wisdom. The obvious danger of the first view is uncreative stagnation, as we find in a good deal of Catholic and some rationalistic thought, while the equally obvious danger of the second view is undirected willfulness, as we find in some Protestant and much Existentialist thinking.

However Thomas also defends the more limited meaning of courage (which he always calls *fortitudo*) as a virtue beside others. As usual in these discussions he refers to the soldier's courage as the outstanding example of courage in the limited sense. This corresponds to the general tendency of Thomas to combine the aristocratic structure of medieval society with the universalist elements of Christianity and humanism.

Perfect courage is, according to Thomas, a gift of the Divine Spirit. Through the Spirit natural strength of mind is elevated to its supernatural perfection. This however means that it is united with the specifically Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. Thus a development is visible in which the ontological side of courage is taken into faith (including hope), while the ethical side of courage is taken into love or the principle of ethics. The reception of courage into faith, especially insofar as it implies hope, appears rather early, e.g. in Ambrose's doctrine of courage. He follows the ancient tradition, when he calls *fortitudo* a "loftier virtue than the rest," although it never appears alone. Courage listens to reason and carries out the intention of the mind. It is the strength of the soul to win victory in ultimate danger, like those martyrs of the Old Testament who are enumerated in Hebrews 11. Courage gives consolation, patience, and experience and becomes indistinguishable from faith and hope.

In the light of this development we can see that every attempt to define courage is confronted with these alternatives: either to use courage as the name for one virtue

among others, blending the larger meaning of the word into faith and hope; or to preserve the larger meaning and interpret faith through an analysis of courage. This book follows the second alternative, partly because I believe that "faith" needs such a reinterpretation more than any other religious term.

COURAGE AND WISDOM: THE STOICS

The larger concept of courage which includes an ethical and ontological element becomes immensely effective at the end of the ancient and the beginning of the modern world, in Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism. Both are philosophical schools alongside others, but both are at the same time more than philosophical schools. They are the way in which some of the noblest figures in later antiquity and their followers in modern times have answered the problem of existence and conquered the anxieties of fate and death. Stoicism in this sense is a basic religious attitude, whether it appears in theistic, atheistic, or transtheistic forms.

Therefore it is the only real alternative to Christianity in the Western world. This is a surprising statement in view of the fact that it was Gnosticism and Neoplatonism with which Christianity had to contend on religious-philosophical grounds, and that it was the Roman Empire with which Christianity had to battle on religious-political grounds. The highly educated, individualistic Stoics seem to have been not only not dangerous for the Christians but actually willing to accept elements of Christian

theism. But this is a superficial analysis. Christianity had a common basis with the religious syncretism of the ancient world, that is the idea of the descent of a divine being for the salvation of the world. In the religious movements which centered around this idea the anxiety of fate and death was conquered by man's participation in the divine being who had taken fate and death upon himself. Christianity, although adhering to a similar faith, was superior to syncretism in the individual character of the Savior Jesus Christ and in its concrete-historical basis in the Old Testament. Therefore Christianity could assimilate many elements of the religious-philosophical syncretism of the later ancient world without losing its historical foundation; but it could not assimilate the genuine Stoic attitude. This is especially remarkable when we consider the tremendous influence of the Stoic doctrines of the Logos and of the natural moral law on both Christian dogmatics and ethics. But this large reception of Stoic ideas could not bridge the gap between the acceptance of cosmic resignation in Stoicism and the faith in cosmic salvation in Christianity. The victory of the Christian Church pushed Stoicism into an obscurity from which it emerged only in the beginning of the modern period. Neither was the Roman Empire an alternative to Christianity. Here again it is remarkable that among the emperors it was not the willful tyrants of the Nero type or the fanatical reactionaries of the Julian type that were a serious danger to Christianity but the righteous Stoics of the type of Marcus Aurelius. The reason for this is that

the Stoic has a social and personal courage which is a real alternative to Christian courage.

Stoic courage is not an invention of the Stoic philosophers. They gave it classical expression in rational terms; but its roots go back to mythological stories, legends of heroic deeds, words of early wisdom, poetry and tragedy, and to centuries of philosophy preceding the rise of Stoicism. One event especially gave the Stoics' courage lasting power—the death of Socrates. That became for the whole ancient world both a fact and a symbol. It showed the human situation in the face of fate and death. It showed a courage which could affirm life because it could affirm death. And it brought a profound change in the traditional meaning of courage. In Socrates the heroic courage of the past was made rational and universal. A democratic idea of courage was created as against the aristocratic idea of it. Soldierly fortitude was transcended by the courage of wisdom. In this form it gave “philosophical consolation” to many people in all sections of the ancient world throughout a period of catastrophes and transformations.

The description of Stoic courage by a man like Seneca shows the interdependence of the fear of death and the fear of life, as well as the interdependence of the courage to die and the courage to live. He points to those who “do not want to live and do not know how to die.” He speaks of a *libido moriendi*, the exact Latin term for Freud's “death instinct.” He tells of people who feel life as meaningless and superfluous and who, as in the book of Ecclesi-