

I AM AN IMPURE THINKER

*Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy*



INTRODUCTION BY

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## CHAPTER 4

# THE FOUR PHASES OF SPEECH



### *Introductory Note*

DR. RICHARD KOCH AND Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy had, in 1922-23, studied Paracelsus together in Germany. Koch taught medicine at the University of Frankfurt and was Franz Rosenzweig's doctor. He fled Nazi Germany in 1937, went to Russia and worked as a physician in Essentuki on the Black Sea. After the Second World War Koch in Russia and Rosenstock-Huessy in the United States wrote to each other again.

Koch wrote to Rosenstock-Huessy because he, now a brain specialist, believed he had discovered in the "lamina quadrigemina" in the human brain an organ which acts as the seat of the great impulses of the species. Here the impact of what our senses register, and what others say to us, here our profoundest insights, Koch says, are recorded. The individual cortex then acts as a brake to the total reaction which is received in the "lamina quadrigemina." The cortex, so to speak, cuts this total impact into pieces. The "lamina quadrigemina" is situated between the spinal cord and the cortex. All vertebrates have this organ in common. So far not much has been known about it, however it has been considered to be an archaic organ.

Koch wanted to tell Rosenstock-Huessy that the "lamina quadrigemina" might furnish the anatomical proof for Buber's, Rosenzweig's and Rosenstock-Huessy's insights into human speech. The speaker, they say, never speaks as an individual only, but always for the species.

Koch was scheduled to report his findings to the Institute

for Neurology at the Academy of Medical Science in Moscow. He died from heart failure before this could take place, shortly after his last letter to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in 1947.

*A Letter to Richard Koch, Essentuki, Russia*

Nov. 4, 1947

Dear Friend:

After my long letter to you I came in the lecture room upon the same complex of questions. In telling the students of your *Quadrigena* Theory, I continued the conversation with you.

You say that the blocks of the cortex prevent an invasion of our pictures of the world by a total reaction. Vice versa, it is equally true that speech saves the totality of experience in the midst of the blocks and channelizes it through these blocks.

Speech is, in fact, the means by which a total experience penetrates in an orderly fashion into the departments of conscious life. If I understand you, your analysis of the brain starts from the fact that the brain is meant to prevent a short circuit in the form of an explosive total reaction to a total experience. I start from the creative aspect of this impediment. Something is achieved by this system of brakes and this something is nothing less than the social digestion of any experience made by one member of the human family. If one "individual" could and would "react" to his own experiences fully and get them "out of his system" by himself, man would not be man. We always experience as specimens of the species. Our experiences enter the whole of society because we have not experienced before we have responded as specimens of the species. The total reaction is blocked up in order to force communication upon the member of the human family who is out in front.

What then is the difference between individual and specimen? The specimen is seed and fruit. Whenever we experience totally, on faith, the species represented by us experiences. And these experiences acquire new faculties. Speech is the way of transmitting acquired faculties. There is no other. It is a way,

as I need not underline to you, which is *material*. To speak does something very powerful to the realm of matter. Sounds have energy.

The articulation of a new experience can be compared to the refraction of light in a prism. The spectrum of colors contains yellow, blue, red, etc. although they all reflect "light." For our analogy yellow, blue, red are the great fundamental persons of grammar: politics, art, law, science; thou, I, we, it. And "faith" is the believed-in unity of the total experience while it undergoes its diffusion or articulation in the brain's departments.

Light and colors cannot be separated. In the same manner faith and the forms of speech cannot be separated. The forms of speech are the articulation of one act of faith into its worldly acts of penetration and communication and naturalization.

Human speech never was intended for expressing platitudes like "the weather is bad," or "come," or "I am happy," or "the moon rises." Human speech corresponds to the construction of our brain so as to permit the transfer of acquired experiences to the race. Speech enables us to gain times and spaces for "settling" a question. Speech *connects* the departments of experience. The event which is expressed can only be expressed in four phases. And the event has not happened, has not eventuated at all unless it has mobilized all the four phasic responses. Not only must the experience pass through these four distinguishable phases, aspects or modes, but also the sequence of these modes is fixed. And the cunning of individuals in omitting one phase or the other is doomed to failure. Our whole civilization tries to omit one phase or the other and is for that reason doomed to failure. Speech holds on to the proper order by its rules of grammar.

The four phases of speech may be distinguished as follows:

1. *Fiativum* (political event)
2. *Subjectivum* (art and literature)
3. *Perfectum* (legislation)
4. *Abstractum* (objects in nature)

The terms are chosen to show the polarity of 1 and 3, 2 and 4. They also could be grouped around the specific eccentricity shown by the specimen in each phase. For the experiencing specimen is 1. *prejected* in the *fiativum* into the unknown. He is 2. *subjected* to the uncertainties of suspense while he sighs, sings, swears and undergoes the pressures of the agenda in process. He 3. is *trajected* over the river of time whenever he can report back "order fulfilled": we have done it. He 4. is *object* of his own analysis after it is all over and he has been dismissed from the exigencies of the situation. Then the object, the event, is a mere "it."

1. Preject
2. Subject
3. Traject
4. Object

everybody experiences when he:

1. Falls in love prejectedly: Love me!
2. Courts and is lyrical—subjectively.
3. Stands at the altar: we have done it, we have come across.
4. Introduces her to the first stranger as "my wife," objectively.

In a closer analysis of the four phases, many more serious processes receive their place. First, the "Harken Israel," the event which means you and nobody else, destines and singles out. The famous principle of selection of Darwin occurs right now and here whenever one specimen listens. For if he listens in the full sense of the term, then the "thou" which listens comprises his genitals, heart, brain and hands and stomach, altogether.

Second, the *subjectivum* creates the social, mental or intellectual group which is introduced to the event together with the first person who is struck by the lightning. Subjective submission to an event leads to lyrical utterance which is always democratic. A man who sings his heart out imparts this heart-subjectivity to all his equals. This democratisation of an ex-

perience enabled Moses to impart his listening to God to all Israel. It enabled Goethe to impart his conquest of suicide in his Werther to innumerable readers. That experience is intended to be personal plus common is shown by the polarity of any *fiativum* which befalls one—the hero of this issue or event—and the *subjectivum* which gives him comrades for the experience.

The “mind” accomplishes this democratic moulding of a dictatorial experience. The first person which moulds the mind is always subjective. The hero never is: he is prejective because he is made over into a new realm of experience and has not yet any “feelings”; hence the hero is “thou”; to himself the hero appears as the instrument of God, as the servant of the word, as the ear of a mouth. The “and God spake to Moses” simply is the correct observation of Moses’ plastic situation. In Deuteronomy we have the same Moses’ subjective song depicting his “mind.”

In the same book, we have his laws, which are the event when it is reported. This is the third phase, the *perfectum*. The subjective pressure of a deep emotion is transformed into the narrative of a past whenever the hero’s “thou” and the subject’s “I” can be tranquillized into a “we.” Lindberg called the book about his transatlantic flight *We* in a most felicitous phrase, as it told the tale of his plane and himself, and tales require some “we.”

From this we can see that the grammatical form of the “indicative” is at home in the perfect and the past. The future has the imperative and the present has the subjective forms which we call optatives and subjunctives, as indispensable modes of their very existence. Neither the future nor the present is in need of a form of speech in the indicative. However, “we have flown to Paris” cannot be expressed in any other way than by the statement of fact. “We got married” is therefore a more primeval form of speech than “I run,” “I go.” In fact, the long “o” of Latin in *amo* (I love) is clearly subjunctive and shows that the alleged indicative of the present for the first person is a mere borrowing from the originally unique form of any “I,” the subjunctive of suspense.

Thus, the tale of an event is the tail light of the event. Nothing has happened which is not reported back as having happened. History is not arbitrary staring at bygone things. History is the articulation of the event itself in its participants; as the event goes by, it proves its passing by being told as a tale. The historian certainly is not the onlooker of an event but the last man whom the event produces. Or in the man who does and tells, the tale which he tells of his hunt is necessary to the restoration of his own freedom from the event. Psychoanalysis allows people to tell the end of their tales because the fixation of the *fiativum* can only cease by transforming the patient's *fiativum* and *subjectivum* into his *perfectum*, his tell tale stage. Of course, the psychoanalytic mode of expression is superfluous in all the positive circuits of speech where the *fiat* is not abortive but succeeded by the communicative lyrical and the statutory historical modes of speech.

These three phases of speech—dramatics, lyrics, epics—have been known to all men always as indispensable and as normal. The fourth phase, analytics, is indispensable too, but the men of antiquity denied that it was *normal*. On the other hand, our times have declared that the first three phases were dispensable, and that the fourth phase was both normal and imperative.

The analytical phase of speech is the *abstractum* as opposed to the *subjectivum*. In this phase the movement dies and is discarded as merely natural. "Nature" we call everything which exists without "you," without "me" and without "us." Or more correctly, "natural" is any experience in as far as we look at it as though it had nothing to do with us. When we tell a criminal that his act was only natural, he is relieved. For we tell him that he is not responsible for it, that he need not waste any feelings about it and that he need not report it to the police. Now these three things precisely constituted his crime before it became natural: his selection for this villainy was his heroic dramatization. His qualms of conscience were his *subjectivum*, and his relation to the law was the historical place achieved for his act.

In the "natural," the act is dismissed. "Nature" laughs at God's "let there be light" as it is the attitude which cannot say anything except "there is light." The fourth phase of speech is

the spirit's death. If we call the impetus by which a total experience subjects one man to the four phases through which the experience is realized "spirit," i.e., a breath of life, then phase four is the phase in which the spirit dies but the specimen recovers. If phase four did not abstract us from our spells, freedom could not exist to start a new phase. In phase four we expire one act of faith so that we may be inspired again. In literature our times have created the analytical novel, the naturalistic picture of an event. This is neither drama nor lyrics nor epics; it is scientific prose. Of course it has never flourished before, as only we have made a cult of the abstract, of phase four. We have inserted death into all cycles of inspiration. Generalisations have become our gods. They are abstract. Great liberty has thus been achieved. But the deification of the abstract is impossible. Speech remains speech, and its cycle still requires obedience. To say "light is waves," seems to too many to replace the other three forms of truth:

1. "Let there be light."
2. "Let us praise the light."
3. "The sun has risen."

After these three, no. 4, "light is waves" is in order.

The appropriation of an experience cannot succeed in any other order than in the order of *fiativum*, *subjectivum*, *perfectum*, *abstractum*. Thy soul, my mind, our statute and its nature, all color any event. After they all have colored it, it has a place in time and space. And that means it is known as a necessary, digested, transmitted experience of the human race.

All things which are introduced as ideas or as facts to us remain playthings. The only open sesame to an historical experience is a specimen's love for it to such a degree that he will be ready to die for it. Idealists and materialists are irrelevant to history. Love alone can incarnate any new experience into our bloodstreams. A specimen who dies in battle impregnates the species with specific qualities, with the qualities with which he is in love and which he defends or propagates. A specimen is not an individual but the fruit of the specific tree of mankind which holds power over both his individual and his genital



elements in turn. The historical specimen—in contrast to the abstract natural individual—experiences an event alternatingly by his propagatory and his individual organs. An incorrect method of experience leads to a castration complex which proves that the experience affects the species-organs directly.

The “quadrigemina” or four phase process of grammatical and articulated speech seems to alternate between the sexual and the individual organs of the specimen in making its appeals. But there can be no doubt that speech begins with an appeal to the species and the specimen’s membership in the species, because all speech disarms and invites the putting down of the speaker’s physiological defenses. A man is taken outside himself by his voice and invites those who listen to accompany him on this ride into the new environment which his speech delineates.

All speech rides the future of a new heaven and a new earth. All speech draws out the speaker from behind his isolation into a realm of communality with the person or persons who listen. This realm is not a mere fantasy; some material partition in space and some historical bridge through time must result from speech when it is in full force.

These facts require a more detailed consideration. To prepare for an understanding that all articulate speech articulates changing spaces and distinguishes changing periods, please observe that you experience time in a manner directly opposite from space. It is mere indolence which compares space and time as by and large parallel frames of reference. They come to us as extremes on opposite poles. Space is at the start universal, comprehensive, one. Time is at the start momentary, split, atomized, many seconds. We always begin by experiencing innumerable times and one space. And we try desperately to reduce the number of disconnected moments and to increase the number of subdivisions in space! Each home, each nation is intruded into the world of space as an afterthought. Property is a dividing line driven into space with absolute propriety because we consider all space as a task for partitions, walls, boundaries and limitations.

The opposite is true of time. In time we all crave growing units of hours, days, weeks, years, centuries, eras. One single

history, however, seems utopian to this very day. But it is of the greatest practical concern to us at this moment. For only the community of One Time and One History may now be possible. Any shorter aspect of the times has become suicidal. But any aspect of the times which exceeds this second seems purely arbitrary and a mere convention to the "natural" mind. So epoch and periods merely "exist." Today's historians discount them by ways of abstraction.

We say, against such "historians," that the only purpose of all speech has been to make an epoch and to make the new epoch stick. The time-building power of speech is the first cause for speech. The space-dividing power of speech is its second cause. The time-building power always aims at the species. The specimen speaks himself and his listeners into a new type of species by taking on a new name, as American or Indian or Christian. The space-building power always aims at the individuals. Which then are the two greatest achievements of the human spirit? If we are right, then the greatest achievements would be the smallest space partition and the most gigantic time bridge.

This is literally true. Any marriage is the whole story of Christ and his Church. The new Testament says, where two or three individuals are gathered in his name, the whole spirit of mankind is alive and present and condensed! How frail this cell is! Vice versa, from Adam to the end of the world stretches a line of continuity which is terribly shaky and delicate and often seems to fall out of our hands into the abyss of time. Whole nations and whole continents leave this continuum and lapse into barbarism. But for this very reason one history for all men is the greatest act of mastery over time. One history for all is not a coarse and crude but a delicate achievement, as delicate as a full communion of heart and soul between two or three in one room's secrecy or privacy.

Why is that so? The smaller my home, the more do I depend for my property on every other man's good will. It is easy for the U.S. to be left alone. But the Swiss are integrated into the whole world for their few square miles of land. Palestine depends on everybody else for its becoming a Jewish homestead.

The German invasion took your Caucasian home. But now turn to the time in which you believe as a doctor and anatomist. This time is measured in terms of progress. As an anatomist of the brain you build on so many past achievements; ergo, you operate there within a time continuum which you deliberately support and expand. Therefore "space" and "time" never are the frame of reference within which we make experiences but they are themselves the phases of realization in our experience. Because in the *fiativum*, the projection into a new situation, we are lassoed into a time corral. What else is the whole history of Israel but the remaining spellbound under the one "Harken Israel" over 3500 years? As soon as a man gives time, heeds any message or any confession, he creates a tension over many seconds of time, he *extends* his faith in this *fiat* into all the moments which it takes to carry out the mission. The *fiativum* creates extended times. Just in doing this and holding the club of an order to be fulfilled over my head the *fiativum* is responded to by me with the *subjectivum*. In this I challenge space to give me a place in which my will to carry out the order may take place and take root. Sentiment requires room around itself, the poet says.

But why is the *fiativum* the true revelation of time, the *subjectivum* the true realization of space? Both lead the individual beyond himself into the species and the society, that is into his conquest of his true time chains and real space contacts. Every powerful name takes me outside my own physical isolation and makes me the bearer of a significant message for the species. Speech conquers death.

Men are meant to speak so that the human race may be like the Single Specimen walking the earth through the ages. Speech is our victory over individual death. It does not abolish death but it triumphs over it. The four phases by which experience enters a man are, then, not meant for his private enjoyment but for his historical service as the cell of one body politic through the ages.

Thus all happening begins as religious order to love unto death; it passes on to intellectual ideal; it becomes a historical

act; and it goes out of our system as a natural fact. The four styles or aspects are elements of the event's taking place. The articulation of a total experience to the specimen is religious, idealistic, historical, natural in this order, so that it may come into existence at all.

But this is one side of the whole process only. While the experience comes into existence and "takes place," we ourselves create the place in time and space for this event. And we do this by transforming our previous notions of time and space. No event can take place unless we make room for it. And this entails a radical reorganization of our own time as well as space. Hence, the grammar of experience may open our eyes to what we really mean by these abstract terms "time" and "space."

The inexplicable laziness of the idealists has thrown around these terms "time" and "space" as though any human being ever had experienced time or space in the singular. Nobody ever has. We know of times and spaces. And we know of them under the strict condition that we create and support and believe in at least two spaces and two times simultaneously. We know of time only in the form of twofold time—we distinguish before and after, and we know of space only in the form of duplicate space—we distinguish inner and outer. These four units, two times and two spaces, are the four phases of the total experience. In order to know of them and to master them our faith must drag us through all four of them and must keep us going while in any of the four. Hence, all men always have known of their quadrigeminal existence, as otherwise grammar's dramatic cycles of "go, let us go, we have gone, going," this unity in diversity, could never have been created.

Man connects the duplicate times and the duplicate spaces through which experience takes the whole man and speaks to him as Thou, I, we, he, alternately. But it is the whole man, not the individual, who lives through the phases of grammar. It is the child, the son, the lover, the father in us, that is to say our genitals, our heart, our stomach, our hands, all four become representative of the experience in turn. This is no empty phrase but literally true. A man's genitals are eloquent when-

ever a man dies for a cause. For he then prefers the death of his individuality to the extirpation of the species in the form he himself as a specimen wants it to have.

Idealism has turned the truth topsy-turvy. Idealism starts with one tiny space called the atom and one immense time aspect called infinity. What idealism considers is only the fourth stage of our experiences, the abstract situation in which we dump one certain order, dismiss it from our conscious support into our merely latent "understanding" as a by now naturalized fact. Nature is our space for historical corpses. Natural science expedites historical funerals. Science allows us to start from scratch. It restores the universe and the split second so that we may build new partitions and new time spans.

Grammar, times and spaces, social history, science, religion, illuminate each other. Politics, the arts, law, science are, in this order, thou, I, we, he, written large. Religions attempt to insure the circulation of the living men through all the four phases.

Society is not much interested in the details of political movements, the arts, law, or the sciences. It is vitally interested in their interplay. He who denies the interplay is society's enemy number one! The *health* of society is "diagnosable" by the intimate circulation from person thou, to person I, to person we, to person he, and by a wholesome respect for the sequence thou, I, we, he as inexorable.