

# IN THE CROSS OF REALITY - 1927

(Translation from Soziologie by R. Huessy)

Feringer notes

Last edited: 6-29-99

1. The problem focus of this essay is how humankind overcomes death.

*All "men" kill, because they must seize living things in order to live. All men die. So nothing that happens could become history if there were no cure for death.*

*The history of mankind is composed on one theme alone: how does love (of life) become stronger than death? (p.1)*

[RF - I believe it is useful to add a personal comment here, raising the question as to what Rosenstock-Huessy means by the term "death." I have often puzzled over attempts at interpreting his work, until I reminded myself of his specific definitions and assumptions. The reader will find it useful to keep these in mind. What Rosenstock-Huessy is referring to here is "spiritual death," since that is the only form of death we are empowered to overcome.

If the reader reviews several other essays, such as SPEECH AND REALITY, PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOUL, or the lecture transcripts on COMPARATIVE RELIGION, he/she is reminded of the three basic concepts of reality Rosenstock-Huessy articulates, with three separate methodologies for the analysis of our experience. The three methods are, of course, natural science, social science, and religious science. Yes, "religious science." (See the first chapter of SPEECH AND REALITY for a detailed defense of his logic.) It seems to me these form the bedrock of his concept of reality, upon which the GRAMMATICAL METHOD is founded. Speech unifies the three phenomena of nature, society and the soul. The soul being the driving force for one's journey toward change, growth and fulfillment.

A fountain of youth, or any other power which claims to extend both physical and spiritual life, depends upon a vital community and that, in turn, rests on individual strength of character, a willingness to make sacrifices to maintain community; inner strength he defines as, "the soul." For instance, the body of Socrates has been ashes for some twenty five centuries, but his spirit (soul) has survived through history to influence any who desire to be enlightened by it. Rosenstock-Huessy's subject therefore is no irrelevant, abstract artifice of religion.]

All serious religions were created solely to address this issue of death. That some religions teach a belief in reincarnation of a physical form is not what Rosenstock-Huessy is defending here. [RF - The Dalai Lama, presenting himself as living in different bodies for thousands of years,

describes the spirit of these lives through history, not physical continuation. The spirit of previous Dalai Lamas is taught to the next generation.]

2. Since early times, beginning with the oral tradition, the word has been carried from one generation to the next. The message is in the form of stores of how to survive: the strength of heroes and failures of villains, in a word, what is reality. Our earthly existence is determined in part by physical needs; we are born, live for a while and die. Our social life is ruled by different laws, of initiation, of celebration of our physical powers (exemplified by sex and passion), and our power to influence our lives (through ceremony, and sacrifice (in modern times, sacrifices in war or other community service). All religions in all ages have celebrated these basic needs in one way or another.
3. Tribes throughout history that survived, we can assume, lived a reality that, at some minimal level, engendered survival. But Rosenstock-Huessy attributes the articulation the bringing them to consciousness, to Jesus of Nazareth. The method for achieving regeneration was thus revealed. "This," ERH interprets here what Bible is about, it is the process by which we overcome death. But the reader may be surprised to learn that this survival may not be what he thinks it does.
4. The journey to salvation, of both individuals and society, is a journey from "outside to inside," from the physical wants of our natural animal nature to the evolution of a spiritual strength of humankind. Another way of putting it is the building of an inner core of strength to face problems and act to correct them - the development of a personality, of a soul. The method requires giving part of our lives to community service, building inner strength by developing the courage to constantly seek and act on truth as we know it when appropriate, and perhaps most of all, constantly working at re-discovering reality (truth).
5. Outer life is ruled by physical needs and described by "natural laws." Laws that describe the inner life of intuition and thought and that curb grievous animal instinct are vastly different from laws of nature. We live in two worlds, then, and while these worlds are different and ruled differently, they are inexorably intertwined, forming the unity we call living, coming to life, moving toward human potential.
6. Natural science cannot comprehend the chasm between natural and spiritual life, between the "outer," and the "inner." Nor does traditional theology, as interpreted today, concern itself with how a natural man (Jesus as a child and later, a carpenter) became supernatural. Yet, we all change in one way or another. Physical changes derive from nature, but learning which transforms us from one level to another is miraculous. We are the animal which holds the potential to become part god, by virtue of our learning to grow and become creative. While this may seem nonsense, because we do not create seeds or any other living form, one may ask just what we do create. The answer should be obvious, we create communities which are the environment in which we, individually, may become capable of thinking something never before thought of. Each stage in this transformation is a small miracle in every sense of the word.

Traditional explanations of religions the world over, including Christianity, seem to believe that gods are gods and ever are, and shall be. Although Christians are in awe of Jesus as a miracle worker, Christian denominations fail to concern themselves with his incredible change represented in this story.

The relevance of this issue, the path from outer to inner, is simply, that the human spirit is the master key to moving in the direction of human potential. The story of Jesus from the Bible tells us of a journey that we also can make, in part. Science explains nature; it has little to say about non-physical phenomena. The problem caused by the gap, as Rosenstock-Huessy describes it, between "outer and inner" life is that it creates a barrier to learning how we change from a lustful animal into what we presumptively call, "a vital human being." We are born totally demanding of our physical needs but with a potential to become creative. None would deny that the goal of all cultures is to teach people to think for themselves, to seek truth, to speak out and otherwise act in efficacious ways, on what we believe. And all of this must culminate in the creation of a decent community because without it we would remain as jungle animals.

7. Spiritual growth is the linchpin to all such learning. Teaching, as traditionally practiced, is mere transfer of information leading to the creation of drones. Vital teaching seeks a transformation of the listeners. To be transformed means to become a new type of being with a new nature. Such growth requires more than thought alone; it must fire involvement, testing of ideas through experience and analysis. This, of course, is not to be taken without risk. The meaning of the Crucifixion of Jesus is that transformation is bought at the price of sacrifice, whatever its form may be.

8. **Creativity** needs to be defined. Basically, the term means thinking for ourselves as contrasted with a life of living on the ideas of others; which we all do, by necessity, much of the time. Creativity must be a constant process of developing new tools in art and science to constantly refine our knowledge of reality and our changing environment. Even using the thought of others demands that we consider and accept or reject that thought; it demands that we be accountable for our thought and actions. A community, at peace with itself, is the essential environment to engender all of these elements of survival. So the notion of creativity in this sense is essential to our survival and therefore the central goal of all education. [RF - One doesn't need to reflect long to understand that survival also depends on a social (religious) morality.] Heaven is not separate from human experience, not a place of sugar-plumb fairies we go to after death; that is the child's vision. The sublime meaning of heaven and hell is as a metaphor for the communities we build.

Thus, the path (method) to our development into creativity is the lesson ERH takes from the Bible. What then is the essence of this method, not entirely original with, but articulated by Jesus?

9. Natural science methods do not claim to inform us about many (the most crucial) aspects of social life, such as the phenomenon of creativity and inner strength. It was created to deal

with description of inanimate phenomena which are predictable and amenable to precise measurement. Yet many social scientists do indeed use natural science method for social analysis. [RF - perhaps as the noted psychologist Edward Guthrie averred, *The scholastics systematized a world of unripe knowledge and thereby protected it from its enemies, but at the same time they denied it the chance for progress.*

The method is inappropriate for social phenomena because many social events remain inexplicable as to cause, and hardly amenable to meaningful numerical measurement, timing, or useful prediction. This is to say, we often cannot explain why one or more persons may have taken some action or why they had some insight. We can only reveal a change by describing a chain of events telling the story of what happened.]

The essence of human experience is that one witnesses transformation of people; an event may change a person from civil behavior into that destructive psychotic, an honest person may become a criminal, a coward becomes a hero, or an inspiration may cause a person to take action that changes history. Many social events suddenly occur surprisingly. Such transforming events are not predictable in specific ways. They seem miraculous. Natural scientists, by their own admission cannot explain the origin of their own creative hypotheses.

10. Why should we take such interest in spiritual (creative) growth? Because it is the driving power for all original thought, for perseverance in the face of indomitable force, for our own transforming process as well as the ultimate necessity for the survival of all mankind. Power, unmitigated by ethics tears the community apart. We enter this world as a powerless, complaining animal interested only in personal gratification and living by the moment with the potential to evolve toward that of a courageous, intelligent person, willing to confront difficult problems and having acquired the capability of regenerating ourselves and our community. Some miracle!

11. Spiritual growth cannot be understood by a method of "pairing opposites" (measurements between acid/base, hot/cold, fast/slow, weak/powerful, etc. Transformations of the human spirit are seldom logical. Rather, the process can only be understood in its unfolding, like scenes in a moving picture where a person experiences a number of acts and evolving stages of behavior; "after knowledge.". But narration can produce crucial aspects of understanding of spirit. We commonly witness fundamental changes in persons.

Such witnessing holds the power, either directly or vicariously, to change one. Example, as an effective method of teaching was known by my grandmother's grandmother. ERH asserts that this mystery is exemplified by the life of Jesus, who began as a natural person (a carpenter), became a visionary teacher, and finally, Christ. The message speaks to us - that human beings are capable of similar transformation. The power of witness is the method by which a new "spirit" can enter and transform us.

12. The term, "nature," defines entities which cannot change; this is usually dead matter. this lack of ability to change allows for predictable cause/effect relationships to be discovered and cast into useful theoretical concepts with a logical unity. Paradox, on the other hand is common in social life: behaviors are often contradictory, a person evolving from a squalling infant into an Einstein is in one sense the same person that has undergone momentous change. Tom Jones was Tom Jones from one to seventy-five years. Speech by itself lacks the power to change one, it must be accompanied by witness.

13. Logic holds power to inform, but never to transform. Measurement in social experience more meaningfully reckons by mile-stones, before-and-after significant events, a before one had emerged into something else. The "divine world" of spirit is briefly revealed by such witnessing; never by words alone.

14. A vital life is not the life of mere plodding repetition day after day. Building a community and a vital personality requires an integrated set of evolving behaviors over a lifetime. One must participate in community life by responding to experience and in the process, learning from it and responding efficaciously to it. We advance in leaps, as each successful era in our lives ends and the next begins. Creation is a never ending process of the end (death) of one behavior and resurrection in renewal. In a small way this takes place in imitation of Jesus, from one stage of evolution to the next, Rosenstock-Huessy implies.

15. Each advance represents a new spiritual redefinition of the world. The world (our perceptions of it) has been redefined when we learn; sensitivity to this new stage will carry the power to overcome our fears and risk action on these new insights. The process of growth carries a moral responsibility because one cannot improve oneself without community. This process of growth by successive stages of transformation advance is trinitarian; we enter the process responding to our world as we have seen it, living what we believe to be a true reality. This, obviously, accepts the past as our authority. Then some experience creates what seems to be a new insight, a new, advanced concept of truth. This "vision" motivates us in the present to act on (test) the idea. In the process of living it, we discover its validity. Discovery of a new truth and acting on it reflects a faith that our change will portend a better future. Obviously, Easter symbolizes this continuous process of creativity.

16. The transformation occurs in three discrete stages of before, during, and after - living in the past, present and future. The essence of growth is to think in new ways. Our everyday thinking always looks to the past.

*All thought is afterthought, thought about a finished world...The creative speaker on the other hand is the mouth of an unfinished world, one which is becoming a word in him....All discovering thought...happens in just this way. (p.5)*

The concept of the Trinity in Christian speech, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, reflects this discovering process. This is to say, our views from the past always represent a tentative understanding of the world, but that understanding is enlarged by a discovery of previously

unseen reality rather than a conceptualization from the past. While that conceptualization is a part of the process, it is eternally incomplete by itself. We only grow through constant stages of change. [RF - certainly this implies the right kind of change at the right time, not change for its own sake.]

17. Thinking for oneself is a necessary, everyman's everyday manifestation of creativity. Rosenstock-Huessy describes the actions of Jesus as demonstrating this trinitarian process available to the human race, unlocking the mystery of growth. He also explains it in this essay in terms of "Life, Teaching and Wirkung," that is, living out of the past, teaching the vision of newness, and being an activist (living the faith in the vision in the present). It engenders the power which "*brings us to life.*"

Change, of course, can result in either success or failure, for better or worse. What does it mean to be overwhelmed by what we believe to be truths we have thought? We must prove (or disprove) the worth of our thought; otherwise it is mere entertainment. Thought, un-acted on, remains impotent speculation. The creative force of the spirit comes after one has lived the vision. And our words only have power influencing others when they are backed by our own actions. Failure, negative consequences are be just as valuable as success because knowing what does not work is useful.

18. ERH cites the metaphor of the seed, blossom and fruit as parallels to creative thought. The seed must be germinated and the blossom pollinated, then, under the right conditions, the fruit will appear. No one element of this trinity has power in isolation; the three parts must be a whole and the proof, of course, is the existence of the fruit.

*The boy awakens as a youth so his feelings may "be thought through" as thoughts; the youth ripens to manhood so that his thoughts may become deeds. If the youth does not eventually overcome glorious squandering of self, if the academic remains tangled in systems and analyses of his own free will, the man who grows from them willy-nilly and who must somehow deal with life and its myriad circumstances, will deal with them poorly, lamed as he is in soul and spirit. (p.12,13)*

19. True learning involves accepting the call of the vision, acting on it, describing to others what happened as a result, then, analyzing for generalizations. What changes us from ordinary to extraordinary is developing this spirit.

20. In sum, this essays describes the path from total dependence on "outer" influences to an "inner" weighing of life. In a sense one may say that experience must be filtered through a spirit, the inner life to be matched against a vision. What is the fruit of creativity?

*The "sinner" looks for life in busy-ness. The man of action/influence knows that busy-ness is only death. He has lived. This life has been transfigured in his vision. If he looks back at life, it is no longer his life that he rediscovers. He has sailed forth from his life, steering a strange ship into the world... (p.13)*

Having changed, one has unavoidably acquired a new perspective on life and both memory and anticipation of the future take on different colors. Our vision has put us in touch with divinity for a moment, but only a moment before we are returned to earth, drawn onward, impelled to recreate the world in the direction of that vision.

*Connected to the star that stood over it, destined to prove the worth of what it has viewed, it climbs back down from the bright space of the spirit into life on earth ... (p.13)*

To truly change in this way is one of life's everyday miracles. It is to think things never thought before, and to act against odds and even in the face of danger if need be; it is taking on traditional powers and propelling us beyond the common earthly animal state in which we were born. We have gone beyond the natural, toward the supernatural state.

...we are not gods. *But we can live in the supernatural, and take life from the supernatural which confronted us in the act of vision and illumination, rebirth and change; and that means accepting a call and working.* (pp. 13,14)

21. Mortals are not gods; they are the animal which is capable of being touched by some creative power. Mortals are part children of nature who are totally influenced from outside forces. This part of us is self-centered, taking no responsibility for the community. We must also become workers, laboring to survive on earth. These qualities of humanness describe our animal nature. Touched by creativity, however, we are also part visionary.

The profound meaning of the Trinity teaches a necessary balance between these three orders of man that can bear the fruit of transformation. Transforming from animal to "human," comes at a price. The moral obligation of intelligence and action is that sacrifice must be made to build the community.

22. There exists different moralities, one for each of the "stages of man." The natural animal part of us explains our need to satisfy selfish wants and defensiveness. The worker part of us describes the necessary energy required to accomplish deeds. Both of these qualities, left to themselves, take us down the narrow path toward abuse of others, self indulgence, greed, hatred, all of which leads to destruction. Individuals and people in groups, public or private, become killers when not led by a principled soul.

Absolute power in any form, but especially that of the state and large bureaucracies, becomes monstrous when led by pure self-interest. This force destroys social life sooner or later.

*The polemics of both Machiavellian "realist politicians" and the ethical fanatics are so unappealing because they seek the divine in men in mere dictatorial imposition on the one hand, and in mere bourgeois morality on the other. That is why the full miracle of the trinity had to take on personality in one man, so that the division of man into a diabolical giant and a divine dwarf, into state and individual, could be done away with once and for all. (p.16)*

23. The final link in the process of creativity, then, must be one of divine selflessness. The individual must pay dues to the community for his survival because a community, fed by both physical and spiritual food, is the creator of language, which is singly responsible for the transformation from the Darwinian society to one which engenders the true human potential. The creative spirit of the individual which brings one to life is, at once, engendered by the community, and the community gives it everlasting life. And religion, in the most sublime sense, can never be merely personal. It too can give us power individually, but that power can only derive from a moral community. And it is for this reason that every living person owes a commitment of some kind to the community. All three moralities - of natural man, of the visionary, and of the worker/activist - must remain in compatible balance within each of us.

Survival occurs because man is free to move back and forth among these three roles, keeping them in balance. The "statesman" at the head of government is essential to prevent it from acting as absolute and adrift. The state, and all organizations within it, must be led by carriers of "divine ethics," not just those of "natural man."

## **IN THE CROSS OF REALITY - 1927**

(Translation from Soziologie by R. Huessy)  
Feringer notes  
Last edited: 6-29-99