

# THE MULTIFORMITY OF MAN

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## PROLOGUE

I have added this prologue because of a debate I have had with a scholar. My colleague took the position that, "This is a brilliant social analysis, but I don't see what I can do with it." This position surprised me. This prologue is offered for the purpose of giving the reader a thumb-nail summary to more easily keep in mind the organization of the arguments during the reading. I believe this book is a little masterpiece, tightly drawn, and the most accessible of all Rosenstock-Huessy's essays. Its message is at once profound and original. And, judging from persistent social problems, of greater interest to us now, in my view, than at the time of its original publication. As far as I can discern this essay is unique among his works in English; I know of no other with this same message.

Rosenstock-Huessy begins ostensibly with a management problem, asking, "What man does management manage?" The question is raised because the emergence of modern technology and its attendant economic system carried with it a terminally destructive side effect. It is a truism, of course, to suggest that monumental inventions, such as the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture, reverberate throughout the existing social structure. These shifts, which are always drastic, require quite literally a redefinition and re-invention of social life. There could be little argument that the industrial revolution resulted in a replacement of muscle power with machine

power, representing a change of equal magnitude to that of agriculture. What then is the nature of the momentous change which he identifies? Mankind, Rosenstock-Huessy averred, must develop a new sense of social time and space, "...such as the earth has never seen before." Dysfunctional societies and groups within them are common today. This essay establishes why our present models for regeneration are incomplete and what a more efficacious model would look like.

The raising of a management question is intended to be representative of all social relationships and the work place is an effective analogy to demonstrate Rosenstock-Huessy's points. He immediately shifts to a more basic question, "What is the nature of man?" The obvious effect of industrialization has been the fragmentation of all aspects of social life which had been stable, unified and largely under the control of small, rural groupings in pre-industrial society. Services such as health, counseling, work, the raising of children, social security in old age, teaching and other basic services became fragmented. Services became removed to separate bureaucratized institutions, distant, beyond meaningful influence of individuals and small groups. Prominent social scholars have written passionately about how lonely, insecure, paranoid and apathetic we tend to be, lacking a sense of identity and significance, all of which leads eventually to violence. *"For no human being can stand the perpetually numbing experience of his own powerlessness,"* wrote Rollo May.

In confronting various bureaucracies, private or public, (it makes no difference), we experience this powerlessness daily. Our great problem then becomes one of attempting to regain some control over our lives. In general Rosenstock-Huessy strikes different aspects of this theme in all his essays. This is to say, he admonishes us to become more conscious of the nature of our experience and understand its meaning. Specifically, in this essay he identifies a new sense of our self concept as a first step toward more control.

In tribal life the individual saw him/herself as an atom in the molecule of the group whereby any separation meant death. The advent of Greek thought redefined this view by inventing the notion of the individual as a stand-alone creator of ideas, and this dichotomy, the individual versus the group, has stood to this day. Rosenstock-Huessy is suggesting that the fragmentation of pre-industrial social structure necessitated a still more refined self concept because the individual has lost almost all of his ability to influence these new bureaucracies. Furthermore, the bureaucracies themselves have become inhumane, uncreative, unable to change - in short, unmanageable. The two primary problems, which we face today are, instability, which powerlessness engenders, and the need to learn from experience and change in a way that creates a future. Given the social diseases which infect our societies, it should be clear that our present ways of thinking about ourselves are no longer viable.

What is the secret to social health which Rosenstock-Huessy has discovered? He names four rules (social laws). Contrasted with the laws of nature described by the physical sciences however, laws of society are different. They refer to something which is living, vital, and therefore capable of regenerating itself. These he characterizes by the name "ecodynamic laws."

The first ecodynamic law addresses the problem of production, of essential goods and services.. Humans cannot function twenty four hours per day: some processes require around-the-clock attention, such as hospitals, dams, emergency services, etc. Since no individual could function this way, the most basic unit of production must be a plural, a minimum team of three persons, each on an eight hour shift.  $3 = 1$  is the rule here. The working molecule of production, when unified in spirit, can be both effective and efficient.

The second problem is that of the power relationship between the corporation and the individual and production team. The working molecule cannot create stability beyond itself because it lacks the power to influence a corporate magnitude. Such influence requires a larger collective such as a profession, or a union which can speak for the individual.  $All = 1$  is the ethic of the collective.  $All = 1$  is the call of the second ecodynamic law.

A third ecodynamic law addresses the problem of change, of reproduction as contrasted with the repetitiveness of production. The constant changes in the world require adaptation; old methods no longer suffice. This is renewal against repetitious production. Change balances a possible future against a dead past; risk against a perceived security in the present; faith against hope. Change always includes risk, which, in turn, is daunting because it can go either way; success or failure, progress or retrogress. Real, meaningful change is an emotional earthquake. Individually, we do not possess the power to face change. Only the deepest form of relationship can overcome the terror of possible failure. Here the smallest social unit must be the dual, where one has deep spiritual, loving attachments that motivate the call to rethinking and action. Deep friendships, trust, and respect create such a spiritual strength necessary to overcome the barriers to change. Thus, the third ecodynamic law is described by  $2 = 1$ .

In summary work teams, collectives and diads appear to define man as only one atom of a group. How then can we call man singular, as the liberals are so fond of declaring?

*Society is averse to man's being taken as a singular. The ideals of our group and class, the usefulness of our productive capacity, the sexual thorn in our flesh. all these forces are making us into parts of larger units, of a work group, of an inspired collective, or of a pair. The naive liberal faith in the ubiquity of our oneness cannot be maintained. Our singularity has to be re-stated. It is no longer self-explaining. (p.64)*

The fourth ecodynamic law deals with the problem of creativity, seeing the world in a new way when old ways no longer seem to be functional. We experience ourselves as a singular physiological, psychological, and spiritual unity at the center of our world. We have fought our way through difficult decisions and creative processes. We can lay claim to having earned a "soul," a personality, much less calculable than that of the visible groups. We know also that, to the extent groups can expand our individual power, they are nonetheless made up of a collection of souls, hopefully cooperating in peace and love. Every great creative act, however aided by others, ultimately represents the freedom of an individual fighting for a remembrance beyond his

days on earth. An individual can only serve these groups if he has developed a singular power, a personality, a unique spirit. THE FINAL ECODYNAMIC LAW THEN IS  $1 = 1$ .

Rosenstock-Huessy has offered four definitions of man; in three of these man is an atom of a group and each group is very different in both purpose and the demands of its members. The fourth face of man is, of course, individual. We imagine physical entities such as teams, communities, diads and individuals to have a unity in themselves, but how are they interrelated? Is it not paradoxical to say that an individual can be all of these things, that is, a team member, a community member, a friend, husband or wife, and finally, "individual" at once?

Multiformity in this sense means that at a particular time we are one or the other, capable of changing roles even from moment to moment. Even capable of changing into a new type of person, as Rosenstock-Huessy always admonishes us to do as a necessity for inner growth. Time then is the integrating bed-rock to understanding the functioning of social life. Humankind is paradoxical in the sense that individuals can change behavior to become something else through time. Unity replaces separateness when time is seen as a whole, that is, a time span over which all elements have become manifest. Structure and function, space and time, must be inexorably intertwined to reveal meaning in social events.

Each of the four forms of the individual then has a separate existence, a different structure, a different purpose, a different spirit and a different time of existence. For instance, life of work teams is perhaps three to five years before a member might leave or new members might be added. Within each life-cycle the team has a unique quality. Diads may be said to last half a lifetime because they cannot exist before maturity. The individual, of course, represents a single lifetime, and a community lives beyond the life of the individual. In sum, understanding the characteristics of these ecodynamic laws can guide us to greater stability and control over our experience. Stability and disciplined control or our participation in them are essential to fulfillment and growth. This is what Rosenstock-Huessy means when he says we need a new sense of social time and social space.

I believe Rosenstock-Huessy has discovered a new paradigm of basic relationships for industrial society which holds the promise of recreating man once again as a whole unified being. No individual can rise above an animal state in the singular, or mass form. He must see himself as multiform. What man does management manage? It must be the whole man lest the neglect of any one of his parts erodes the stability and unity of the whole.

## NOTES FROM THE TEXT

Multiformity: The essential notion of this book is that the modern tendency is to define man in terms of single individual, or society. ERH contends that there are other elements of Man that

identify human needs, and to ignore these elements, to over-simplify the definition of man distorts our understanding of our own condition.

1. The modern industrial age has created a new type of man. Where in the past the peasant working his plot of land applied methods of production over which he could exert control, technology fragmented his life, rendering many of his skills obsolete overnight. His sense of time and timing changed as well, producing a new sense. Man today lives in a new time and a new space, and he is burdened to define this new time and space in a way that will regenerate society.

The book emphasizes two major streams of thought. The first questions, "Which man does management handle?" Indirectly it asks a much more important question:

"What is the nature of the new man that technology has created?" The answer is that the rise of science has attempted to treat man as a machine: "...the world crumbles because some central fallacies about man are passed around as science today...science for four centuries has assumed that man was a part of nature and could be investigated LIKE ANYTHING ELSE... Will our economic thinking begin with economic man, the labor force, or with the whole man, not only as the producer of goods but as the reproducer of society?"

The answer is, of course that it must deal with the whole man.

In another dimension, ERH emphasizes the universal theme of man over mere "economics," wherein he points out that the "factory" is simply a more permanent "house" than any one man's house, and the term "factory" also stands for all public establishments that must last longer than the life of one man.

By starting with the factory as the most ephemeral kind of house in society, we can hope to prove in an unmistakable way the temporary character of every house. (p.34)

Man has several social tasks to perform in order for society to regenerate, work is simply one of them. The laws of the work-place must not determine all of man; it must recognize these other social tasks and needs of man and reconcile these other rules within its boundaries. (p. 35)

2. The second chapter details the fragmentation of time that modern industry has created. All work units are units of time, each of which is equal, each of which is intended to be as predictable as possible. These leave no room for the unexpected, or for the planning of change - in short, for a future for the worker, man. "The question arises: where is he going to find his future?" (p. 22)

3. The molecule of production, First Eco-Dynamic Law. (p.23) A working unit is minimum 3 because man is not a machine that can function 24 hrs a day. Modern man's state in work is that of a group member, one of three 8 hour shifts. "We have distinguished man's state of aggregate in work and for work as something which resists complete individualization." "Work in society

goes on whether a father dies, a child cries, or a wife's heart breaks. This is all expressed by the equation: three equals one. `Three' expresses the un-individual and social character of man as co-worker." (p. 31)

The author's logic explaining this first eco-dynamic law is as follows:

- a. The conflict between economy and thermodynamics is no longer needed. We have discovered the first kind of house devoted to nature, the house by which nature is made recurrent. The factory has incorporated nature into the family of man. Thanks to the era of technique, nature has become a part of man's own history. No wonder that we can reconcile thermodynamics and economy. Housed nature is no longer the nature of mere physics. It has been conquered by an historical victory. Hence thermodynamics can be balanced by eco-dynamics. On the other hand, we discovered man himself to be part of this nature housed in the factory. He and his unique properties must be studied in a scientific way, since he has been made a part of nature. Man, who cannot be explained by the laws of thermodynamics, that would be an insult, an insinuation that he is dead -- need not feel insulted if we begin to study his behavior in the factory. Eco-Dynamics may even restore his dignity among his elder brothers: steam, coal and electricity. (p.32) [RF - It is a matter of historical record that individuals were indeed treated as cogs of machines and it is precisely this treatment that Rosenstock-Huessy speaks against when he used the term, "restore his dignity." He strives here to replace machine-like "management science" with a humane science which didn't kill the spirit of man.]
- b. No member of the "team" must take advantage of the absence of the other because members are interdependent. (p.26)
- c. The optimum size of a working unit depends upon that size which can be efficiently organized and managed in terms of the needs of the workers. Frictions between people are inevitable of course "It would be much more profitable in many cases to study these frictions than the seconds of time which figure in the time studies of piece-work." (p.28)
- d. The group must protect the individual as a unit of "some" stability for the individual. Modern work, as contrasted with the farm, is a transient place, one does not spend his life there, only part of it. Thus, there is no stability or little stability and therefore, the group must serve, in part, this function.
- e. The group is a "living" unit, it has a beginning, middle and end and becomes obsolete, or its members change. Living things die, dead things do not. The life of the group is from 3-7 years, a time unit that depends upon the group, not some abstract principle or factory plan.
- f. A principle feature of the "first eco-dynamic law, three = one, is that the unit of production must be formulated at the smallest unit, not the single worker as the free enterprizers do, and not at the level of 1,000 as the communists do.

"The science of eco-dynamics in its formulations must give the minimum requirements and not the maximums. It is opposed to the Liberal or Communist confusion between political science and political programs. We purposely say 'three', while the political leader says 'all and everybody.' He is right; but we are right too. The thing that makes Communism impossible, or at least delays it indefinitely, is the Communist party." (p.34)

#### 4. THE LABOR MOVEMENT - SECOND ECO-DYNAMIC LAW

The basic problem ERH raises is, how does the individual gain power and protection? The answer is that he/she must become a collective. ERH explains that the collective is to be distinguished from the masses; in other words, the collective is something between the masses and the individual. For instance, mankind is the total, electrical workers are a part of that whole, and therefore a collective. The electrical workers were forced to organize when management identified them as "labor" rather than "their employees." A community (municipality), a labor union, a neighborhood, a profession are examples of collectives.

a. The collective represents the common characteristics of a type more or less an idealized set of characteristics. It thus represents an important force in personality formation, i.e. "when a young man ...looks back on his juvenile past he must think of it as the regular life of a young man of normal health and morals and of moral and healthy normalcy."

b. Why is the collective important? Because the individual is too powerless, he/she needs to belong to some group, or group of groups, to experience friendship and reinforcement and identity. "We all wish to get rid of limitations or fetters of reality. To all men collectives offer the escape they desire from the prison of our existence." (p. 41)

c. Collectives represent, in the time perspective, something in flux. "Ideals are not immortal. They are tendencies in our dealing with reality. They are expressing our fears or hopes about reality, they are our program of the future." (p.42)

The second ECO-DYNAMIC law therefore is, ALL EQUALS ONE. (p.39)

#### 5. The Secret of a Self-Perpetuating Body, Third ECO-DYNAMIC Law

A review: It is because nature is sleepless and mankind, being human, requires rest, that he must organize his community into different modes to combat this. 1) The first eco-dynamic law defines the working team, defined as extending over three shifts. This definition follows the rule that archetypes must be represented by the smallest unity, not the largest. Thus the designation, 3 = 1. 2) In education and all voluntary groupings where we seek commonality with others, we require the collective. A collective represents an idea that must live longer than a single person. Thus the 2nd law, All = 1. Mankind requires the shelter of the collective. 3) For reproduction, (regeneration) the dual, the diad, opposites, friend/foe, male/female, you/me is necessary.

"Whenever we become interested in the processes of succession of life on earth, heredity, reconstruction, historical evolution, we are bound to look at reality with eyes similar to those of Plato or Hegel. The universe appears as a dialectical process." (God/devil, light/darkness, man/wife, heaven/earth.)

This law says that in all relations which are representative of generation and regeneration of man, TWO EQUALS ONE.

- a. We need the depth of intimate friendships that last longer than a single day. Thus, a true marriage must be more than a series of sex experiences.
- b. THE TIMESPAN OF GROUPS. (p.49) - 1) the timespan of the working group is from 3 to 5 years. "Careful observations carried out in a factory over a period of 5 years, corroborated the fact that the constellations in the best team which make for the efficiency of a group are exhausted after that time. All possible varieties of rivalry, competition, good neighborhood, leadership are exploited. ....A new commander, new privates, other sergeants must join the company. Or it will grow stale and soon the army will be rotten." (p.49) - 2) The collective, on the other hand, is too much work not to exist for a long timespan. The church, government, a professional organization all must outlast a single generation. "The life of the spirit outlasts the physical life of one generation.....Our modern society, unaware of the contradictory concepts of "man" that are at the bottom of our various statements about man, has fallen under the despotism of short time spans. ...A group of scientists observing the stars through an endless series of centuries are all serving the same leading idea, astronomy." (p.50) HE POINTS OUT AS WELL THAT THE INABILITY OF MODERN SOCIAL SCIENTISTS (I.E. PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SOCIOLOGISTS) TO RECOGNIZE THE IDEA OF COLLECTIVE (FOR INSTANCE A MARRIAGE) IN LONG TIME SPANS, ALLOWS THEM TO TREAT ALL EVENTS IN SHORT TIME SPANS. 3) THE DUAL is a polar unity, existing longer than the working group, but not longer than a generation (the collective). "The telescope of centuries and the microscope of hours and seconds are extreme." The dual organizes loves, of another, of a profession or country; it represents a conscious commitment that lasts half a lifetime (it cannot begin sooner than adulthood).
- c. We need the dual because we need an alter-ego, to obtain feedback sympathetically about the effects of our behavior. "Without the dual we all would go mad after some years of doubt and discussion. It allows us to exchange ourselves with somebody else without losing our personal identity!" The notion of friend, wife, father, mother, brother etc. implies one other party to the "whole."
- d. The notion of an alter-ego means that with the diad there is an intimate relationship that goes beyond the contract, beyond self interest; one gives more of one's self to the intimate relationship. It is based upon love, and such energy and devotion is essential for the regeneration of any body or relationship.

Paradoxically, the dedication to the duo is actually against self-interest. It is self-sacrifice for the



good of the two. "Propagation, then is in contradiction to self-interest. It will be the more efficient the greater the self-interest it has had to overcome and the greater its power of overcoming it."

e. "We acquire a new status and a new character by being vested with the partnership in a body containing us and somebody else. Our body is now replaced by this body politic into which we have been thrust with our partner." (p.57)

## 6. The Singular Man: Fourth ECO-DYNAMIC Law

The author begins once again by summarizing: "You must work. You must grow. You must love. These three equations demand fulfillment. But in each of the three the alleged singular "man" has turned out not to be a singular at all. Plurals, collectives and duals occupied the seat of the driver against all the liberal concepts of the classroom thinkers." (p.62)

He begins ostensibly with a management problem, pointing out that the advent of modern technology that engendered the city, reducing rural economics, caused a major shift in the life-support systems of mankind. In asking, "What part of man does management manage?" he answers that it must be the whole man, but then he had to ask, "Who is man?"

a. Man turns out to be several things: - 1) because nature goes on unceasingly (24 hrs. per day) posing a need to protect against weather and hunger, man must join with others because he needs sleep. Thus, to protect against nature, the minimum work group is three (8 hr. shifts), although it may be up to 15 or 20. The eco-dynamic law is, one (unit) = three (individuals). The man is then 1/3 of a working group. The TIME of the working group is 3-5 yrs before it has exhausted its originality and requires regeneration.

b. Because work and causes and government must last longer than the lifetime of a single man, the collective must be organized to perpetuate the common features of man and carry on the causes. This allows humans to perpetuate themselves, living beyond a single lifetime. Here "man" is also a member of a collective, and the eco-dynamic law is one = infinity, man is one of an infinite number of members in the collective. The timespan is an entire lifetime.

c. Because man is ultimately lonely and needs to be understood deeply, he must have intimate relationships; thus he is a member of a duo, a husband/wife/brother/sister, a friend. He must love and be loved. The ultimate manifestation of this need is, of course, marriage. "It is the response of the feeling, thinking and reflecting citizen upon his duties to his country." (p.63) It is thus conscious and can begin only in adulthood, its timespan is half a lifetime.

d. Finally ERH asks, to what extent is man singular if he ever is? "The question turns out to be puzzling indeed. For the naive thought of the period between the French Revolution and the World War, from Kant to John Dewey never felt any difficulty in dealing with the singular of man as the clearest and safest unit for reasoning. To us the situation is the reverse. Anything is more easily understood than the reality of such a unit or unity. This bundle of nerves, this

receptacle of collective slogans, this changing lover and suitor of all faiths and causes, why should he not be split?" (p.64) He is split into a working team member, a member of a community, and a wife/husband or friend. "Society is averse to man's being taken as a singular. The ideals of our group and class, the usefulness of our productive capacity, the sexual thorn in our flesh, all these forces are making us into parts of larger units, of a work group, of an inspired collective, or of a pair. The naive liberal faith in the ubiquity of our oneness cannot be maintained. Our singularity has to be re-stated. It is no longer self-explaining." (p.64)

e. ERH discusses the definition of man as a rational animal, and points out that to do this means one would eliminate youth, old age, hours of passion, of sleep, of all non-rational consciousness, and end up with a small percentage of the individual's existence. On the other hand, man as a biographical unit, birth to death, having transcended all of the problems of work, of contributing to the community and of friendships, - finds his soul. "By relegating reason to its proper place as one of the planets which are influential upon man's biography, we have paved the road for a direct access to this biographical unit, man." (p.67)

f. What is the place of individualism?

"The soul is man's power of fighting his way through different situations, different forms of existence, different convictions and social relations. Man cannot avoid passing through many appearances and semblances...It is in those moments of extreme danger when a man might be mistaken for neither but one in the many that his soul begins to move and to persuade him that he is not doomed with his environment. When everything seems to be calculable in a social setup, this one soul remains incalculable." (p.68)

g. The soul is not the same as mind, although many seem to have mixed up the two during the past 200 years. It becomes the connecting and integrating force to mediate the phases between membership in working groups, communities, friendships and marriages. "Man has many forms of appearing in this world but just one soul. That soul is no external form itself, because it is his power to overcoming death and change and coining meaning out of catastrophes and havoc. What is the meaning of a sonata? It is neither in the many sounds, nor in any one melody nor in a special harmony. But nobody can doubt that the sonata has a character, a meaning, a singular uniqueness." p. 68

Finally he answers the question, what man does industry manage? It must manage the whole man. "Industry, though it mechanizes agriculture, must nevertheless invite us to farm the unique soil of man himself. Living in an industrialized world, he can survive only if he is treated as if he were a special kind of soil. This is a reconciliation ...by which man and nature exchange roles." Thus, industry must manage the whole man so that he can survive the problems in the other parts of his life, so that he can come to the lathe or office desk or classroom with spirit, and capable of regenerating all phases of his existence.

The old science either treated man as an invariable, or as indeterminable. "He remains one thing plus something else....the laws of eco-dynamics defined these invariants of plural and collective, dual and singular." Man is multiform. ( p.71)

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