

# THE ORIGIN OF SPEECH

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## Introduction

Dr. Harold Stahmer offers an excellent introduction which, in addition to a brief biography of Rosenstock-Huessy and the original contribution he makes to social science, describes the centrality of speech to this new method for social analysis. Speech makes the man: "The origin of human speaking is the speaking of human origin...The very name of God means: `he who speaketh: He puts words of life on our lips.'" (pp. XIV,XV.)

Speech begins with vocatives (subjects being spoken to) and imperatives. It begins with "formal speech," which moves men to action and is embodied in ritual. Our grammar books, on the other hand, begin with the nominative (the thing or person named), and the pronoun "I." The nominative is usable only when an experience is over. I can only respond as an "I," after I have been addressed as a "thought." "I" is the last pronoun a child learns to use.

We discovered that our systems of formal logic were skewed by accepting this nominative

distortion of our grammarians. The beginning vocative and lyric stages of all experience are thus called illogical, even though they are essential before the narrative and nominative (abstract) modes can be applied. Common sense, or daily talk, is a derivative of formal speech.

Gender, in vocative-driven grammar, has a social meaning in addition to the physiological. It identifies the required participation in living interactions, and is not synonymous with sex. Neuter, in this context, is not a third sex, but refers to all dead things. Thus, vocative grammar is a mirror of the stages of human experience. Inspiration through a vocative or imperative addresses us as "thou," then forces us to respond as "I." It makes us report as "we," and at the end, a story (narrative) speaks of us as "they." In this way we are conjugations through stages of experience.

Instead of mental health, grammatical health is proposed. Grammatical health requires the ability to command, the ability to listen, the ability to act, and finally, the ability to free ourselves from the command by telling our story. Only then are we ready to respond again. Grammatical ill-health is demonstrated to lead to war, dictatorship, revolution and anarchy; and ERH shows how formal speech can overcome these four social diseases.

This four-stage unit of speech - command, listen, respond, analyze - is best defined in terms of a complete "time-cup" to be fulfilled and discarded. All social order depends upon the power of invoked names to create a never-ending series of such time-cups.

We call this method of describing experience The Grammatical Method. It is not exemplified by a set of rules as with traditional grammar, but rather as a method to help us understand our history and experience, to help us differentiate between valid and invalid names. It also helps us to determine responses appropriate to the stage of a particular experience or event.

Grammatical experience of this kind changes us. In the world of today, there are people at many different stages of grammatical development, and our method offers them hope of more successful interaction and understanding. It give us all a common history, a history aware of timing, and a foundation for a possible peace among men. (p.129)

Formal speech is what creates us as human beings; "...it intends to form the listener into a being which did not exist before he/she was spoken to. Human speech is formative and it is for this reason that it has become explicit and grammatical...language can name a place, Tipperary in Ireland, and a child, Dorothy, the gift of God. This, animals cannot do." (pp.4,5) If, Rosenstock-Huessy reasons, we are formed by speech, his most basic hypothesis is that through understanding the structure of speech we can understand better the nature of our humanity. It would follow then that speech reflects our social health and is the path toward social regeneration.

## **Chapter 1 - The Authentic Moment of Speech**

1. There are three types of human speech, preformal, formal, and informal. Informal is a loosening or ignoring of the formal, and therefore always succeeds the formal. Preformal is animal speech, which also invests some human speech; informal derives from both formal and preformal. Formal is the most primary.

2. These distinctions are crucial to understanding the centrality of speech to our being! Formal speech is what makes us human.

...we must forget all our informal habits when we wish to understand the sublimity, elation, exultation, gravity and precariousness which it takes to speak formally. (p.3)

By indirection, if formal speech is what makes us human and informal speech derives from it, to set aside formal speech is to erode our humanity (community). Formal speech must be understood as containing the forms or structure of the way we become capable of expressing ourselves. Reliance on informal speech, or mistaking it as equal in importance to formal speech, destroys the roots of our language.

3. To understand speech, one must begin with animals, or with primary (informal) groups such as the family, gangs, military barracks, all of whom use informal speech as a matter of course. This is contrary to what psychologists, or linguists, or philosophers normally propose. The child does not explain the man, where speech is concerned, because speech was taught to the child. Thus, the evolution of speech is 1) preformal, 2) formal, and 3) informal.

4. Formal speech, the creator of our humanity:

...aims at something not aimed at by apes or nightingales: it intends to form the listener into a being which did not exist before he was spoken to....The greatest forms of man's speech are names. They clearly are not animal language...the very name of God means: 'he who speaketh; he who enthuses man so that man speaketh.' (p.5)

5. Formal may therefore be named "nominal." Pronouns - you, I, my, we, it, etc. - are used instead of names. Thus our list of preformal, formal, and informal can be replaced with pre-nominal, nominal, and pro-nominal.

6. There are many overlaps between human and animal experience, a nurturing family, a lover and coy mistress, a leader and his group, etc. When formal language originated, humans found themselves between two opposing influences, the pre-nominal and the nominal. This situation created the compromise, or shortcut to speech - informal speech was thereby created. The pronoun logically had to become part of informal speech. This is a logical conclusion.

With the intimacy of small, face-to-face encounters, less formal speech works perfectly well. The relation between animal, man, and child is revealed. "The ape in us speaks pre-nominally, the man in us speaks by names (i.e. formally), and the child in us speaks in pronouns." (p.6) Thus, speaking informally, we can be understood by using animal signs and sounds, i.e. by

grunts, cries, moans, etc. But such speech never transforms one.

7. Lullabies, nursery rhymes, gossip, prattle, whisper, propaganda, jokes, puns, sales talks, advertisements, etc. are informal - in the realm of the pronoun - emptying names by pointing, hinting, suggesting. And at the same time they empty some meaning from formal language. They do support the formality and power of real names when the formal is unnecessary (i.e. small group situations). For instance, it would be absurd to call your father Mr. Jones most of the time.

It becomes crucial then to know the proper type of speech in the proper place, when and where it is lacking, and why it needs to be cast in proper grammatical forms.

8. The meaning of the question, "What is the origin of speech?" is that always there are different environments exemplified by the three forms of speech. These environments do indeed exist and therefore call for these distinctions. The first languages existed in the pre-historic/pre-linguistic fields of force. Individuals and groups are forced to become articulate, or perish.

A group where members are warring is in a pre-nominal stage, as related to the enemy, and must begin the road to healing by going through the three stages in sequence. Science also is a formalization of the order in any environment. Only with science (order) can we work to correct chaotic situations. "When we have learned why one state of affairs is negative...we begin to understand the origin of the good." (p.9)

To formulate the problem of speech in such a way shifts the field of the question out of linguistics and philosophy, to the realm of politics and history. "...new speech is not created by thinkers or poets, but by great and massive political calamities and religious upheavals." (p.9)

This is the opposite from studying the origin of speech by studying child psychology, because formal and informal speech are not invented by the child.

When do we feel threatened by the absence of speech? There are numerous situations, all of which reflect different dimensions of the problem.

## **Chapter 2 - The Four Diseases of Speech**

1. A speech theory based on politics, such as the one advocated here, holds a distinct advantage over a theory based on abstract linguistics. For instance, one can clearly identify "speech-lacking ways of life," war for example. Each side holds different assumptions about what is good and what is evil; what is right for one side is wrong for the other. In ancient times, the power evoked by names of gods for each side were kept secret. Each party spoke in different idioms, if not different languages. Peace can begin only when speaking begins between the parties. The outbreak of violence between two adjacent countries who don't speak beforehand is no accident.

Speaking establishes law between the parties, then a new speaking unit is born that is common to

both countries. War represents a spacial discord between neighbors. Speech during war means a non-trusting of the enemy, and therefore it is not listened to or believed.

2. A revolution is a break in speech also, a battle between the old and the new, between two parties in a stale culture, full of hypocrisy. Certain values are provided by those in power, but only practiced with lip-service. Laws favor the privileged, family is idealized, but divorce is high because unstable community values are felt as temporary. Patriotism and freedom are invoked, but in fact they characterize only the privileged. A protected class stifles new experiments that might shift power. In sum, the old practices are opposed by the new (young), who desire a more vital future.

The language of the old has lost its meaning. Speech here is broken off as well, because while the parties may use the same language, the words mean different things. All of this is saying that the visions for the future are in conflict. Language becomes "hollowed out," as Martin Buber put it.

3. Degeneration occurs when the old have nothing of meaning to say to the young; the young see no future for the community. Vitality exists only by way of constant change and experiment when the old ways no longer work, so when no new enterprises originate, sources of new life dry up. The same failure in speech occurs as with revolution, which breeds degeneration. The old order is said to be degenerate in the sense of abusing and robbing the youth of their future. Our present national debt is a good example; debt means borrowing from the future, by definition. Degeneration represents a counter-revolution to the revolutionary situation, a gap in time between the past and the future. (p.13)

4. Anarchy (crisis) is the counterpart of war. From the standpoint of speech, war is not listening to the enemy; with anarchy, there is an unwillingness to give orders. That means inadequate leadership, because to give orders implies rights for those who carry them out. (p.15)

5. Summarizing these points:

War - occurs from disagreements about national borders and not listening to what the foe says.  
Anarchy - is the lack of leadership in institutions; no leadership means no rights, and thus crisis occurs by not telling the friend (or citizen or employee) what to do. The situation is usually brought on by unemployment.

Revolution - is an attempt to create new rules for a community, rules that, at first amount to inarticulate shouting (young inventing new words, or new meanings to old words, because of the hypocrisy of the old).

Degeneration - is the young disbelieving the old, seeing their speech as hypocritical repetition of words that are meaningless to them.

Speech includes listening and speaking, articulating and repeating. A healthy

speaking group uses old terms for new facts (repetition), new terms for old facts (articulation), spreads out to new people (speaking), and includes every worthwhile speaker (listening). The two acts of listening and speaking constantly extend the territorial frontier of speech. We want to be able to speak to all and listen to all. The two acts of repeating and articulating constantly extend the temporal frontiers of speech. We want to link up with all past and future generations. (p.15)

6.All four acts are fraught with risk:

- a. In war, people who advocate listening to the enemy are excluded.
- b. With anarchy, people who advocate speaking to "down-and-outs" are excluded.
- c. In revolution, orders from the other side are ridiculed.
- d. With degeneracy, "shouts" are "inaudible" (ignored).

One should not be misled by the cosmic suffering at these catastrophes. Is speech really the cause and solution? ERH answers with a resounding, "Yes." War is deafness, peace is willingness to listen. Revolution is shouting, order is the ability to formulate. Crisis (anarchy) is muteness, credit is willingness to entrust. And decadence is stereotype, rejuvenation, new representatives. When speech is reestablished, the catastrophes, "...shrink to human dimensions." (p.17) It thereby reestablishes the community by making the problems manageable.

7.If this is true, the structure of language should bear witness to political purposes, and highlight the consequences of our experience.

8.All four diseases and cures are inter-dependent; the occurrence of one leads to the others in time. The structure of speech, as correlated with these types of events, can be evidenced by history. In modern times the forms are both oral and written, while ritual and ceremonies bring the past to us in the present.

Speech was intended to make peace, to give credit, to respect the old and to free the next generation...By defining language as a social form among other forms of social behavior, it will be seen in its inter-relation with other institutions. (pp.18,19)

## **Chapter 3 - "Church and State" of Prehistoric Man**

1.Animals and biologists reckon life from birth to death. Considering social regeneration, one must reckon life the opposite order, from death to birth. This is because through speech we are capable of passing on our learning to the next generation. The child does not have to re-invent knowledge, as does the animal, but he/she can be endowed by the dying generation.

These two powers of prescience before my birth, and of determination after my life, distinguish me from the animal. The origin of speech lets the "natural" relation of birth and death be superseded. (p.21)

2. A burial, a funeral, a eulogy, an obituary are the speech forms and ceremonies that exemplify this death/life sequence. There are no human beings who do not bury their dead. Man thereby ceased to be an individual. Rather he was called to continue in his parents footsteps. It reverses nature by overlapping it with a social continuation of life. Death is thereby transmuted into its opposite, and life is transmuted into its opposite. [RF - emphasis mine.]

3. The initiate is told where he is going. To anticipate death, to treat life as though it already stretched beyond his parent's death, he is given a name that lasts beyond his physical life, and he is called to bridge time into the next generation.

4. Society (speech) reverses the chaos of nature and the law of the jungle. In nature every specimen is born, and dies by itself. Fate prevails. Speech, on the other hand, creates continuity, freedom, peace, and order. Man's emancipation from the animal forms means an enlarged share of life.

5. Modern thought tends to mix up into one stew, individual life, eternal life, social life, and historical life, thinking all of them as the same. It is important, ERH asserts, to make distinctions and indicate relationships.

6. Is speech really capable of bringing order to chaos, and does history really indicate this? Human societies begin in islands of peace, and they cannot begin with war or revolution, where incest, war, jealousy, rape, and anarchy are rampant. Peace is based on eliminating sexual competition, and this, ERH asserts, motivated the invention of the family as a legal unit. While forms of marriage vary, all tribes have such forms.

7. The family has constraints. Chastity in the family, which "tones down sex," limits incest. These taboos are the price paid for peace. Originally, chastity did not apply to the individual, but rather to the mores within the family where sex was controlled and incest was taboo. (p.24)

In sum, ERH provides examples of where the animal inclinations of humankind were ordered, and the family was created as an island of peace where strict rules needed to be applied. There was a rhythm between chaste life on the one hand, and orgies and festivals on the other.

8. Before modern society positions in the family were stations of office; father, mother, brother, and sister were formal titles of offices first, and only sex relationships secondarily. If any member of the family conceives of its members as individuals, separate from a station in the family, the family as a unit begins to break up. Today, "singleness" is common and more economically possible. Family structure is much less stable, divorce common and violence in the family has increased.

9. The creation of social groups and institutions with offices, titles, and names was against natural animal behaviors. Within the family, any member, husband, wife, son or daughter, can represent the family.

They are of one flesh, according to the Church, which again seals the covenant of peace above 'individuality' or, better, their 'dividedness.' (p.25)

This beneficial, but unnatural unit, is the fruit of speech and would not be possible without the naming and the handing down of traditions from parent to child.

10. Belief in marriage is akin to belief in God, or gods. Both are founded on faith. With marriage, our sexual and other instincts continue to be with us, but marriage boundaries create peace. Faith that such an institution is necessary to maintain a community is all that overcomes our natural instincts, just as belief in some power outside us that imposes rules to make us better requires faith. Both marriage and belief is founded on the same power.

11. There is a fundamental conflict between faith and reason, between theology and science. It is "reasonable" to follow one's sex urges in whatever context. Only faith (in the future of the family) would restrain one.

12. Legitimate children are free to anticipate a "legitimate" place in the future of the community because their parents, having publically taken vows, have declared that the children were planned and would be under their protection and preparation.

My own future is made possible by the love of the preceding generation....Hence, every marriage meant the founding of a small nation with due respect for the freedom of its future citizens, the free and legitimate children. Parents sacrificed their lifetime and devoted their whole being to this founding act. (p.27)

13. The tribe must be understood as an extended family. But the basic unit of all community, originally, was the family, and since it preformed all functions - law, economics, medicine, etc. - from the family came our present formal institutions. Thus, the wedding vows can be understood only in terms of indicating this middle ground between the past and the future, between preceders and successors, between ancestors and grandsons...an act of respect for traditional and for freedom simultaneously. (p.28)

## **Chapter 4 - The Conflict of Political Sense and Common Sense**

1. Any political structure (institution) expands the power, and the times and spaces of an individual. This expansion is unnatural rather it is "supernatural," transcending both time and space. However, stabilizing as institutions are, they collapse without the faith and renewal by individuals committed to them.

2. Formal speech is the means for creating such faith and renewal through nominating leaders, who invoke a common spirit, initiate law, and signify to the body politic its institutional values.

3. Chaos is complex; it may annihilate bonds of fellowship by failing to give credit to those who produce, thus creating anarchy. It may annihilate vitality by destroying freedom, creating degeneracy. Or it may annihilate laboriously established new boundaries, creating war. The institution is always in danger of these basic forms of chaos. All of these forms of chaos may be reversed by formal speech. The very naming of social ills helps to cure them.

4. The tribe preceded the family, because peace and order could not occur until speech had been established. Family life functions on an informal basis (using pronouns instead of proper names) - and common sense implies that tribal formalities pre-existed in the family. The intimate living conditions of the family means that one can use shortened, informal speech because of this intimate experience. When we know people less well, we must be more formal, addressing them as Mr. and Mrs., or "Mr. Chairman." Formal situations require explicit rules (laws), where informal speech does not require these.

At the fireplace of each family, the high speech of the tribal spirit is shaken down to the lowest denominator. Thereby it becomes common sense. (p.30)

5. Common sense (informal speech), therefore was derived from the formal speech of the tribe that preceded it. It makes us at home within an existing structure. The notion of Rousseau's "noble savage" and Franklin's "poor Richard" are false.

6. The formal act of naming, itself, is a political one in the sense that any new situation requiring a new name requires the group's agreement. Otherwise understanding is lacking. Lack of understanding leads quickly to chaos.

7. The cry for peace and order is a desperate cry. Shouting for freedom and for regeneration of the good old days, is futile. To establish peace requires specific understanding of the conditions for peace. This is to say, the creation of new rules that will be followed by the victims of chaos (the shouting, raging, crying, weeping people), who cannot be salvaged until the miracle of peace is experienced. FORMAL SPEECH PRODUCES EXACTLY THESE MIRACLES. (p.31) [RF - emphasis mine.]

8. Does speech always reduce chaos, or save a community? Obviously not; it fails as often as it succeeds precisely because people misunderstand, people lie, people do not have the courage to speak. Some of the group are brutes gone berserk. Some wish to break with the group and begin anew, on their own. To speak is always a risk with no guarantees. To speak is also to give power to others by virtue of the very act of revealing one's thought to others. To say one thing and do another, to teach one thing and believe another, to behave in private differently than in public, all are forms of the "devil."

When oaths become hollow forms, all of these forms of deception are the diseases of common

speech; conflict cannot be far behind.

Ever since man spoke, he has been divided against himself. Only half of his speech is successful and fully understood. The other half is either dead wood, or it is betrayed...The true miracles of speech, as with all miracles, are threatened by their false imitations.... Our analysis of the forms of speech should be helped by our sense of danger, of possible betrayal which lurks in all speech. (pp. 32,33)

## Chapter 5 - Speech Versus Reflection

1.To speak is different from reflection. Speech, both formal and primal, is used when there is chaos, or "high tension." To speak the truth in this situation is unsettling. The result is unclear. The temptation is to "cool out," use stale words, incantations without meaning, without the will to act on them. (p.33)

2.ERH cites the Revolutionary and Civil wars. In 1776, the articles of faith in this new country promised free and equal treatment. In 1860, the unwillingness to carry out this promise came to a head.

3.The names of original speech face in three directions: they face the public who is told, the person who is called, and the spirit that is invoked. (p.34) Modern thinking, in good scientific fashion, classifies different types of speech, the specific and the general, taboos, etc. Authentic speech cannot be classified as going from facts to generalization. To change the community, to save it from further chaos, one must be willing to speak. One must be willing to be quoted, and to insist that the thing must be said. Speaker and listener must have faith that the words are true, have the courage to defend them from attack, and have hope that the community will believe the speaker. The power of speech is founded on this triplicity. And when this is lacking, the words are dead.

4.The product of analysis is quite different. To generalize is to abandon the real situation where crisis occurred. Generalization has its place, but only after real events have been described. Analysis derives from real life experience. The act of science, is an act of faith in the truth of his work, his hope to be believed. He thus participates in real speech. But the product of his work, the stripping of the risk and emotion of crisis from the incident being analyzed, is the "graveyard" for the living meaning for words. [RF - I believe he means by this statement that generalizations, by nature of being abstractions, derive from past events. New events confronting one in the present may or may not be accurately described by the traditional general term; therefore, misunderstanding may occur. ]

5.The act of being scientific follows the course of true speech: 1) The speaker's predecessors established the method, and the speaker is also a follower (listener), 2) He is checked by his colleagues - the speaker speaks in fellowship, 3) He exposes himself to possible contradictions in the future - the speaker leads.

6. In this final section of the chapter, ERH defends the notion that, with "the creative mood of languages," names are fulfilled in the future. We can know a person only on their death-bed. During their life they are still fulfilling the meaning of their soul (their name), and before that time of death, meaning cannot be finally pronounced. Thus, to speak "primally," is to look toward the future. In this sense language creates our new social reality.

## Chapter 6 - Logic on Trial

1. Science is said to be "reflective," in the indicative mood. It defines and describes something, and neither the speaker nor the listener can do anything about it. It speaks about a past event, a fact. To say, "Johnny is stupid," is an indicative statement that tells the listener about the attitude of the speaker. The indicative mood absolves the speaker and the listener from any participation in the fact, except intellectually. Indicatives are not a call to action, but a call to reflect. This is the essence of logic, a pure intellectual act.

2. "Greek Thinking": At some time in the past (ERH doesn't give a date, except to refer to Alexandrian scholarship, which he asserts did not produce one poem, prayer, or law. We assume some time around 356-323 B.C.) Greek thinking focussed on the indicative mood as the true form of thought. By contrast, this was not the case with the Hindu, Hebrew, Egyptian, Chinese, and others. In these non-Greek cases, ascertaining reality utilized other moods such as the imperative, optative, and narrative. In these non-Greek cultures, then, logic included all four. He cites Genesis as an example of reflecting the other moods of thinking about speech, excluding the indicative.

By this omission the connection between logic and the Bible, between reason and faith, was obscured. Both seemed to speak of different processes: the one (non-Greek) based on imperatives, optatives, narratives: the other (Greek) on indicatives. And both stubbornly declined to compare notes. Hence theology is illogical to the logician. And the logician appears irreligious to the theologian. How absurd! (pp.40,41)

3. There are four moods in the description of an event. in terms of speaking about it to another. These include the call or motivation for action, the action itself, the describing of what happened during the experience, and finally, the analysis and generalizing. In speech terms, these are 1) imperative, 2) optative, 3) narrative, 4) indicative.

4. With these four, there is a speaker and a listener. Either one or both can refer to the act itself. They must be carried out in sequence to make sense. The example ERH gives is as follows:

give an answer

may I have an answer

you have answered me

he answers

this sentence is the answer

The first four are examples of speech, the fifth is an example of thought (reflection only). The contrast is between speech and thought. The first four place the speaker and listener in relation to concrete truth, and the fifth is "academic," abstract, timeless.

Speech, in its origins, was unwilling and incapable of formulating sentences in which speaker and listener did not enter. This follows from the situation of oral speaking. (p.42)

This is to say, since complex thought evolved only after speech, the original speech situation included only the speaker and listener.

5. The indicative relates to things and situations which need to be identified, and for which law depended. An example would be, "Was it murder or self defense, theft or borrowing?" The phrase, "This is," is a judicial sentence that makes no sense unless summing up contradictory proceedings. No abstract sentence is true without such antecedents of concrete data. (p.43)

There is an important distinction here, one between data and conclusion abstracted therefrom, as to what "things" the data indicate. Thus, the indicative (analysis) always succeeds the other three moods. [RF - emphasis mine.] Here ERH implies that "fact" is always a judgement deduced from data (i.e. from the narrative) where there is a speaker and a listener, even though they may be tied by the written word rather than face-to-face. Obviously, there is always the assumption that something living preceded the thing described. He gives examples of names such as Hitler, Japan, Negroes, Churchill and Roosevelt in WWII, that are all "loaded with living reality."

6. Abstract statements make sense only in relation to real concrete statements and to a speaker and listener.

"It is illogical, then, to build a complete logic on the logic of abstract statements." Abstraction voids all data of life, it has transmuted the living into dead things, timeless, unpowerful." (pp.44,45)

7. In conclusion, no true thinker can lay claim to understanding wisdom unless he/she knows the difference between living and dead statements, which is to say, he/she has participated in the creating of the abstraction, thereby infusing life-giving into the speech process.

### Speech as a Social Process

a. What Greek (Western scientific) thinkers tend to forget is that their science, their "facts," are related only to data. They forget that, had there not been a community, a family that sacrificed for them, a family that created speech in a community of peace and finally a profession which taught them their methods, they would not be present to research. All of these antecedents take time to produce, a much longer time than their work. They make no distinctions between these two

types of knowledge (living and dead statements).

The four root sentences given above, - "answer me," "may I have an answer," "I have answered you," and finally, "he is answering you," - have a logical sequence. Imperative must precede optative, which must precede the narrative, which must precede the indicative. (p.46)

b. There is a "secret" logic tying together the speaker and listener, which is the order by which it is being carried out. This unity is in a single time capsule. The time taken for each step will differ. These relationships are often called "frames of reference" today, but ERH asserts this concept is wrong. It is rather a "field of correspondence," of a speaker and a listener, and related to an event. A frame of reference is an abstraction outside the incidents, rather than being a necessary aspect of the exchange.

c. Formal speech (speech that moves people) is corporeal, while casual speech is not; three characteristics demonstrate this. 1) Any idea that is acted upon becomes social because of its consequences, and therefore corporeal. 2) With a situation of speaker and listener, the burden is on the listener, the receiver of the imperative. But when the listener becomes the speaker, the roles are reversed. 3) And finally, there are changes in the physical world as a result. With informal "chit-chat" such as "the sun is shining," there is no call to action.

The division of labor, action and response, cannot exist unless there is formal speech in which people are moved to act, and formal speech rests for its success on these steps of function and role changes that take place in sequence. "Forms of language move people who speak and who listen, into the field of correspondence and out of it again. Speech is movement." (p.50)

d. The dreamer is not "under orders" of an imperative, so unless he acts, he has little effect. The scientist who ignores these steps preceding his report cannot succeed in understanding the roots of his own creativity, i.e. command (imperative), response (research), narrative (report of methods), and finally generalization.

The imperative: p.51

a. Three important facts are expressed in the shortest form of any verb, 1) that somebody receives an invitation to act, 2) that the act lies in the future, and 3) the act is specific. The imperative form of the verb preserves the most ancient layer of human Speech. It invokes the original situation of formal speech. In this case two humans are temporarily fused in a time cup - the single word (imperative) sets all this in motion.

b. Three more facets of formal speech: one person is asked to obey, a worldly act is required, and the time span sets aside time for obedience to perform the act. "All achievements are formidable." (p.53)

c. Obedience. In these situations the listener is transformed into the role of a "soldier," a participant in a social process. The imperative reveals the confidence of the speaker that he

knows the world and what must be done in it. Mere knowledge is transformed into its purpose, action. Therefore the imperative ranks as more important than mere indicatives, because it transforms known life into a future. The imperative decides and defines an epic; the order given marks the divide between before and after (the decision), moving people in history; reason shines brightly because it is acted upon.

#### Between Order and Realization - p.54

a. Imperatives make us feel "enlightened," lighting a way into the future. It is empowering to make a decision and act upon it. However, the imperative is enlightening only if it is fulfilled. The narrative gives meaning to the imperative. The basic principle is that for effectiveness and achievement, creativity, etc., there must be this cycle of acts, followed in sequence, with each successfully completed.

b. At times, with large issues such as the establishment of justice and law, years, perhaps thousands, may elapse between command and response. "Thou shalt not kill," for example. Implied here is the notion that, in the case of lasting and important issues, each generation must create its appropriate response in the light of its situation. ERH cites the example of W. James' essay, *THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR*, which to this day has not created a response, as his admonition/prophesy has been ignored. (p.56)

#### The Lyric - p.57

a. What is between beginning and end of the sequence? What is needed on the part of the person taking action to insure completion of the command? One needs morale to go through with it. How is this achieved? One must be "on fire" with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is "lyrical." Some rhythm needs to "...contain reason for action." We sing. The lyric is between the dramatic and epic. Its grammatical form is usually called the subjunctive, although in Greek it is called "optative," and in Latin it is called "conjunctive." "It is a mood of deprecation and curse, of blessing and praying, of rejoicing and wailing, of laughing and crying." (p.57)

b. To be on fire is a condition of a life really being fulfilled. This emotional drive must not come from "brute passion," which leads to vice. It must come from inspired reason. "Lyrics have their logical place and their grammatical forms between imperative and report, because they allow men to be on fire without becoming brutes."

c. The lyric is a reflection of the appearance of the first person singular, the subjective in speech. The process of carrying out the act involves keeping up one's spirits, weeping, singing for joy, and other emotional support.

The lyrical mood descends into the dark depths of our body and carries the light of reason into the bottomless pit of the fires of sex, fear, jealousy, ambition, greed and pride which are born in these depths. ...In Aeschylus' tragedies the real event is that for the first time the inner life of the hero behind this command becomes speakable. (pp.58,59)

### The Narrative - p.60

a. The narrative is the epochal mood; the imperative is more concise, the narrative more lengthy. The second contribution of the epochal mood is that it is in the third person plural in one sense. "He" is neither speaker nor listener at the moment of telling, but rather in the role of the observer.

b. Furthermore, the narrative is historical, nothing to do with logic or with generalizations. The two types of speech, narrative and imperative, are far apart.

### The Abstract - p.61

a. The abstract has no meaning out of context. To say love, murder, chair, life, etc. raises only the vaguest of thoughts. To say, "This is murder," can only have meaning in relation to some specific event.

b. The Greeks reversed this order by putting the concept of "principles" first. As a result, narrative truth is reduced to a form stripped of all specifics. In short, classifications are raised to the highest value.

c. While it can be useful in some instances to be freed from having to remember all the living details of evidence by use of abstracts (classifications), for example to say, "I am depressed," it is important to understand that this represents only partial truth. Rosenstock-Huessy is adamant in defining the limits of abstractions, which he has dubbed "Greek thinking." He refutes the notion that thought of this type is more complete and rational than language (i.e. the utilization of all moods of speech as he defines above).

d. While this assertion as to the limited truth of abstractions seems somewhat academically obscure, Rosenstock-Huessy says its meaning could not be more destructive to our understanding of experience. Five thousand years of grammatical and linguistic evidence in Western culture shows that beginning the teaching of language with abstractions, is just the opposite from what we need if we are to understand our experience. We cannot begin with abstractions but rather with the narration of events - events that create a "time cup" of imperative, lyric, and narrative, before the final abstraction (indicative).

e. There is one more important aspect of this notion of abstraction. That is, numerability. The abstract represents several possibilities. Contrarily, in context, in the narrative, that same abstract can only mean one thing. It is unique and singular! Another way of making this point is to reflect on the fact that an abstraction represents a summary of single events. The phrase "a chair" says that many individual chairs have been witnessed, and the concept summarizes their nature, something to sit on. In this sense, many unique examples have been bunched into a single category.

f. A category such as a principle, the Greek philosophers claimed, was timeless and

always the same. And yet, it could not have been conceived without the time experience of viewing many singular events. For this reason, Rosenstock-Huessy refutes the Greek notion that abstractions could exist out of time. Thought is not out of time; it could not occur without a physical presence of the body that includes a brain and that experiences things over time.

g. In another dimension, Rosenstock-Huessy differentiates between narrative and indicative moods by pointing out that history (that is, narrative history) is full of emotion described by the experience of people showing risk, greed, love, etc. Science, by contrast, is stripped of emotion, objective (removed from social experience), and therefore abstract. The scientist, however, cannot or does not consider important all of the travail that was the price he personally paid for his creativity.

h. ERH ends this section by placing the notion of abstractions in their proper relation to the other moods of experience, at the end of the time-cup sequence of the imperative, the lyric, and the narrative. It is useful to embrace the idea of the Greeks for the final step of generalizing in the indicative mood.

#### The Full Cycle of Speech - p.68

a. ERH summarized this chapter by reminding the reader that, if events are to be ordered for the purpose of creating community, the action to do so must occur in the sequence of: 1) An imperative - "Do this." 2) The lyrical full of emotion - "I am doing this." 3) The narrative - "This is what I have experienced in the process." 4) The indicative - "This is what has been accomplished." (The objectification and classification of the event).

b. This cycle is viewed as the natural, unavoidable sequence of events that must follow if anything to be accomplished. The steps of this sequence vary enormously in time-spans. For instance, after two thousand years since Jesus, Christians are still striving to fulfill his commands. The time cup of democracy continues after hundreds of years. At the other extreme, a time cup may last the few minutes required to take out the garbage.

c. Each of these sequential steps represents an order of grammar in tenses (past, present, future) and in moods (imperative, lyrical, narrative, logical). Other connections can be made as well. For instance, revolutionary, future, and imperative belong together, as do lover, present, and lyrical. Also, story-teller, past, and narrative as well as scientist, past, judgmental, and classifier are units.

d. Each stage also represents attitudes toward issues in the community. For instance, to be conscious of the "present," one must be sensitive (to emotions including one's own), willing to participate in society, find common ground. The giver of imperatives, and narrators, require an acute sense of loyalty to truth. The revolutionary looks to the future, and in so doing may be less sensitive to the present. The evolutionists, the lovers of history, look to the past and tend to treat time as endless.

Each stage can be seen in terms of emotional temperature, the and giver of imperatives is "hot." The listener and subject acts "warmly." The process of narration should be neutral, and the scientist exhibits "cold" objectivity.

e. Formation of a community requires that people must communicate, understand each other, and agree, or find some modicum of agreement, as to each of the stages along the way. Contrarily, disorder occurs when the thinking of any group in the community becomes trapped in any one of the stages. The visionaries, the ones taking action, the reporters, and the scientists all think differently or represent a necessary but incomplete form of thinking. In general, the community must balance between these. And such balance must apply to the individual, as well.

f. All of this seems to add up to providing us the a road map with reference points to indicate our progress or retrogression in evaluating experience.

## Chapter 7 - Dress and Speech

1. Rosenstock-Huessy asks, "How can my assumption, that formal speech has been spoken over long periods of time, be verified?" There is evidence: Luther answering a Pope's words uttered in 1202, Jesus being called the second Adam because he spoke of regeneration, philosophers responding to statements made years or generations before other philosophers. But, ERH asserts, there is even more telling evidence in the meaning of formal dress for ceremonies.

2. One of the most basic human instincts is to conquer death, and death is conquered, not physically, but socially, by way of passing on our social position and name to those who follow us.

The power to connect more than one generation is not given in nature. If this death could be overcome, the danger of becoming *res unius aetatis* - (a matter of one age) - was conquered. Funeral rites celebrate this conquest... All dresses are the uniforms of successors to people whose names have been recognized after their death, or resignation from office. They are names bestowed on successors, connecting a before and an hereafter. (p.78)

3. Dress and formal costume reflect a formal social role that changes. No human group is without dress. The present aspect of time is invisible without dress as a symbol of a social role.

We acquire, as I quoted before, a different body by putting on a doctor's gown, a priest's garment, a bathing suit, or a nurse's uniform... History is a constant making and unmaking of temporary social orders... (p.75)

4. We acquire freedom and power by such investiture. Major beginnings of social roles begin with initiation ceremonies, indicating a political and mental lifetime.

5. All names came before the bearer, and they associate the individual with groups, thus providing a set of cultural beliefs.

## Chapter 8 - Ritual

1. Ceremony celebrates milestones in life, birth, death, marriage, initiation, etc. And each ceremony has its unique ritual, unique in dress and speech. Ceremony and ritual originate as life and death truths that demand our attention or the community is doomed. By definition, then, ceremony and ritual deal with long time-spans, into both the past and the future. All formal speech begins in ritual, because ritual defines elements of our experience. These truths that call for ceremony provide only general guides to action. The burden of the action is to constantly fit our methods into new patterns that will re-establish the truth mandated.

2. Ceremonies deal with past accomplishments (what we have done), as marked by monuments, stories, eulogies, and obituaries. What is allowed in the future is represented by inaugurations.

3. Inaugurations must protect freedom, because one is not sure what the future might demand. Freedoms are protected by rules that empower the subject. The role of the subject at the inauguration is to be a listener, to those who have served in the past. Thus, biography, monuments, funerals, etc. are recalled.

4. All of these milestones represent serious, long-term evolutions of processes that must occur in the interest of community survival. They tie together generations. When ceremony is applied to short-term events, the practice is vulgarized and leads to secularization. When ritual or ceremony loses its meaning, it becomes hollow, the subject of satire. When such meaning is lost, when performance of duties is not seen as a life-and-death matter, we lose our guide-posts ahead of us.

5. How do we interpret primary ritual, as to its importance and power to move us? Not by the mere conveying of ideas. Conveying ideas would take little power to perform and may not move or command the listener. To create a life, a community, is to create time, a super time. This takes power, which in turn is created by ritual spoken at the right time. A ritual takes time in dealing with past accomplishments, and inaugurations. This time in the present unites past and future.

6. The more we honor the names of the past, the more claim do we lay to the future. (p.81) By naming, we create super power, and super time for the community. By naming we are describing a clear orientation of time and our place in the larger ongoing processes.

The true leader invokes a spirit (through ritual), which unites and gives direction to the community. Almost as an aside, here ERH states that power of the future "...is in the hands of those who can provide jobs, and that means order." (p.84) [RF - I assume here he means this also indicates a way into the future that will continue divisions of labor. This would continue giving meaning to individual lives. The emphasis above is mine.]

7. The history of law indicates that an interpretation of the period between death and birth requires the law of succession to be fundamental.

The first and originally the only law is the law of succession. The two codes, the penal and the civil, depend on the difference between a violent death and a natural death. (p.84)

8. New ritual celebrating victory over oppression creates a victory over a negative aspect of life, and order out of chaos. ERH cites the apostle Paul, who advocated women speaking in church. This was revolutionary in his time. The Holocaust Museum recently opened would indicate an evaluation of what we have learned from Hitler.

9. All of this is relevant to the centrality of speech. Our rise above animals is based on our ability to remind ourselves each generation of our history and what must be done in the future. None of this would be possible without the power of speech, manifested through dress, ceremony, and ritual.

10. Before our era, no word ever got into the dictionary unless it was used in ritual. Names were not names before the chieftain or medicine man had addressed them in public ritual. Flowers and animals, fire and water, trees and stones, all were spoken in the ritual before anybody ever spoke them. (p.87)

Ritual is needed to create language which will go down through fifty or one hundred fifty generations. Languages are immortal because they aimed to immortality...Speech did not name the materials of nature; it did name the historical roles of men and things as they appeared to the "thing" or things of the tribe. (pp.87,88)

## Chapter 9 - Grammar and Ritual

1. If all this is true, the logic of our sentences follows from the structure of the ritual. [RF - What Rosenstock-Huessy calls, in other essays, "a higher grammar" than that we learned in elementary schooling.] The grammatical forms described in this essay, as contrasted with traditional Alexandrian grammar we have all learned, makes sense in real life situations. The traditional grammar (I love, he loves, we love, etc.) is learned out of context.

Ritual begins with pronouncements by an authority, that is to say, by ancestors and gods, addressing listeners (you!). Each grammatical person in the exchange is of equal importance in real life, because first and second person are interdependent.

2. In everyday speech, a speaker assumes the presence of a listener. One makes no sense without the other, just as this writing would make no sense without you, the reader, to whom I speak here.

3. We know who we are by being named, by belonging, by being spoken to, all of which means we are first conscious of ourselves as a listener, in the social role of son, daughter, lodge member, etc. Only later does our ego, represented by the "I," the speaker, appear to us consciously.

4. In tribal ritual there were four stages; 1) Members were addressed. 2) They sang and danced on

being called. 3) They listened to the narration of the myth of the hero, long dead, who is represented by a mask. They heard of his power and deeds, which they would be called upon to pattern their behavior after. Finally, 4) objectification finalized the ritual in the form of a moral of the story.

Artifacts dug up by archaeologists are physical remnants of a once living, life-giving ritual. Art, science, law, education, religion, and sports are our present-day rituals.

5. Modern dictionaries are a listing of dead words, dead because we should not be free to use those words without taking action on them. This is because thought, if not preparation for action is impotent. And it is precisely that action that breathes life into our languages, ourselves, and our communities.

## Chapter 10 - Question and Answer

1. Rosenstock-Huussy asks once again, "Do these statements about ritual apply to everyday language?"

Take two types of questions for examples. 1) "Is this the road to Paris?" and 2) "Is there a God?" The former prepares one to participate in community life, the latter does not, and therefore is defined as a pseudo question. The ritual in the first question lies in the demand for a commitment, e.g. "Will you serve?" This commands a life-time of commitment. To answer, "I will," makes people feel in contact with the divine when they dare to say, "I." (To speak is to participate in a possible creative act, which is a divine act.) (p.97)

2. Another type of question is that of doubt and searching. When responding, we are acting in the role of first person, "I," perhaps doubtful and insecure in feeling our authority. Our affirmation comes from prayer. "Prayer directs, illuminates, establishes him who has to speak with authority." (p.97) We are all priests, ERH declares, and ..."Priesthood is the right obtained by prayer to speak with a claim to being followed and obeyed." (p.98)

3. The purpose of ritual is to establish the authority of the speaker, the truthfulness of the listener(s), and the truth of the statements. In this process the ritual has achieved three things:

- a. Who and what questions fill a gap in established sentences.
- b. Promise, oath, and pledge questions place a witness behind his deposition.
- c. Invocations and prayer authorize the questioner to speak, "in the name of freedom, decency, science, poetry, etc."

All of these questions define the speaker, the listener, and the world outside. (p.99)

4. The first set of questions reaffirms the time axis, presupposing a history of spoken life. A

stranger who asks these questions is asking to participate in the community.

The second set of questions extends into the future. Those admonish people to back up laws, traditions, hopes, and promises.

The third set creates authority. All communities need leaders, who must have authority. These authorities are not superior human beings, but rather are figureheads through which the higher authority speaks.

All speech depends upon this distinction between speaker and listener, between authority and respondent.

All speech creates history and future. High and low are established. In the three sets of questions they may be recreated and imparted. (p.102)

The answer to the question, "Does common language have the same structural grammar as ritual?" then is yes, but it is an informal speech. Common language must reaffirm past and future.

## **Chapter 11 - The Trivium and Symbols**

1. Symbols are everywhere, in the dress of judges, in wedding rings, etc., symbolizing the voice of their constituents. But there can be no symbols without previous speech, which established the symbol in a ritual ceremony. Symbols are crystallized speech, and crystallized speech is metaphorical. All speech is metaphorical in part.

2. Speech must be partly metaphorical because it must have the power to suggest a quality beyond mere appearances. Science is also metaphorical for the same reason. We cannot witness an atomic nucleus, we can only diagram it, and the rest must be suggestion.

## **Chapter 12 - Grammatical Health**

1. We have to be spoken to, lest we go mad, or fall ill. (p.110) All persons need to be addressed as unique. We need to be loved, and this "exclusiveness" must be experienced.

2. This notion applies to leadership as well. All leadership is based on the leader thinking of, and being understood by, his/her people. The leader thinks in terms of "my unit," or in the army, "my platoon." And only thus does that leader, parents included, have the right to give orders, or make requests of those who are "their own."

"Come, Johnny." The invocation, "Johnny," draws out the mother's self, the verb, "come," draws out the child's self. Both surrender to a mutual interaction. (p.112)

3. The vocative (to invoke, to call) and the imperative are natural forms indicating solidarity in

groups between speaker and listener. The leader calls the name and gives the order. The responders give themselves to the cause. The leader rising beyond himself in this act. "Come, Johnny," joins the imperative and vocative. There could be no community without the vocative case and the imperative mood. These are a necessity for the health of the community.

In retrospect, neither the leader nor any individual follower can take personal credit for the achievement. That must be a "we," accomplished by a merging of the speaker and listener into one.

4. For health, we must be free to change between the "you" and the "I," and the "we" and the "it," depending upon the demands of the situation.

The religious, the poetic, the social and the scientific mind all should have their say and their grammatical representation in our souls. We must be "you's," before we can be "I's," "we's," or "its" to ourselves. (p.117)

Grammatical health is the health of transubstantiation, of substantial change. It (the spirit) must die away, and be resurrected time and again. This is because the spirit (of a cause, say) eventually becomes stale and must be resurrected.

5. "Ex-authorization" is a term Rosenstock-Huessy coins to reflect the declaration of the end to some spirit of an action that has died. His assertion is that one must end a spell, a marriage, an oath, etc. when its purpose has passed, and a new action must begin. This is the reason for sequence; one must begin with the spirit, the willingness to accept a command, to take a vow, and one must not be dissuaded from this crucial act by the fact that it must be absolute. For instance, if a marriage is only one interest among many, if it is a relative commitment, then it is very likely to end in divorce.

This then presents a paradox. One must make the commitment as though it were the only important act in the world. Then, when it is done, one must end it. In terms of the "thou, I, we, it" sequence, the "it" indicates a time for analysis, when the commitment is dead and over with.

Grammatical health is to maintain the integrity of the "time cup" for action. "The ex-authorization of speech and the reference for the time cup are both the main tasks of grammatical health." (p.122)

## Chapter 12 - Genus (Gender) and Life

1. Gender holds a social meaning and it is crucial to distinguish this meaning from physiology. In this last chapter, Rosenstock-Huessy demonstrates this importance as reflected in our grammar. The important distinction in everyday living is that between living things and inanimate objects. Living beings have eyes and ears and take action; dead things are important, but not to be considered living. Social scientists, treating people as "objects" (objectively) who cannot speak or listen, mislead us. Actuarial concepts notwithstanding, the purpose of social science is to

help us understand our experiences and their purpose, to build a viable community.

Witnessing and living witness, gender and speech, create the times. (p.120)

2. There must be divisions of labor within the community. The basic divisions in society for action are essentially between the person ordering and the person doing, the first person singular and the second person (listener). These divisions are, of course, carried out by both men and women. But sex, as merely a physiological concept, is often mis-transformed in our grammar to a concept of a division of labor. To unite physiology and a division of labor, as the same, is to stereotype social roles to the point of making them destructive. It is to treat one as having no ears, and the other as having no mouth.

To engender social health and community, it is crucial to make the distinction and treat the grammatical "gender" as representing social roles that may (must) be carried out by either a man or a woman, depending upon the appropriateness of the situation.

3. In a parallel way, in ritual, corporeal things are used metaphorically, to represent concepts different from the objects themselves. In ritual, one's armor was representative of the role of soldier, and buried with the individual to indicate that his life, as well as his social position, was ended. "They sealed him into the deliberately created space and time, country and period, of which he had become a member." (p.123)

4. Supporting the notion of social role:

Astonishingly, nearly any word in Greek or old-German could be turned into a masculine, a feminine, or a neutral form...gender is a fundamental category of speech and...it does not intend to describe sex." (p.125)

5. We, of course, experience both men and women giving and receiving orders. The fundamental division of labor in grammar is, then, between subject and object. This means the ability to make war and to make peace, to be dramatic at one time and undramatic at another time.

Gender is the interplay of speaker and doers of "the word," of revolutionary act and evolution, of sudden gradual process, of today and always, in life the life of speech...this is the ambitious aim of gender in grammar (p.127)

## THE ORIGIN OF SPEECH

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