

EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY

**THE CROSS OF REALITY**

*Woods Hole, Mass., July 16, 1965*

*Freya von Moltke: I wonder whether this is now on this tape, and whether I can hear it or not. Maybe I have to start again. I have to try it out first before Eugen comes in.*

## CHAPTER ONE: DELOS

I

1

### *THE STORY OF THE CITY PLANNERS IN DELOS*

For the last two years, the city planners of the whole world have met on the island of Delos in the Mediterranean to contemplate their mission and to see how the state of the world today demands a common effort so that man in crowded spaces may not be suffocated and die from the anarchy of his dwelling places.

Now why did they meet on Delos?

If we could explain the reason for the choice of this strange meeting ground, I think we would know a little bit more about the conditions of our own thought, and our own mental life.

2

It is strangely unknown that a man, in order to see what is around him, must first be delivered from his inner panic and fear. Already St. Augustine has said in a famous place, that even those people who do not have reason to fear anything, fear their own fear.

Man is a fearful animal. And it always takes *a society, a group, a family, a friendly circle* to put him at rest. Before man can think, he must be offered a situation in which thinking is not threatening him with loss of position, outer danger, or any other threat from the outside. Because man left to himself in a desert, or in the ocean, must incessantly, be on his mettle.

*He must observe.*

*He must spy.*

*He must notice what's going on.*

*He's like a stock broker at the stock exchange, where in five minutes, a million shares may change hands...*

3

...the mental state produced by this wild world is described by Michael Faraday.

...Faraday, one of the pure-hearted men of the 19th century, the great physicist, once said of man, in this badland around him:

*"What a weak, incredulous, unbelieving, superstitious, bold, and frightened, what a ridiculous world ours is, as far as it concerns the mind of man. How full of inconsistencies, contradictions, and absurdities it is. I declare that taking the average of many minds which have recently come before me, and apart from that spirit which God has placed in each, and accepting for a moment that average as a standard, I should far prefer the obedience, affections, and instinct of a dog, before it."*

4

This, the famous physicist, wrote on July 25th, 1853, in a letter to the continent of Europe. It is like a proclamation to warn our objective world of scientists, that they themselves may be rushed into such an ocean of *troubles, doubts, misgivings, and insecurities*, that man is not apt to be able to think objectively, and that a very great amount of work, of faith, of political order has to be established before the objective thinker can start to work.

II

1

We here are concerned with all the preparations for such study of man as *sociologists, psychologists, chemists, biologists* today try to evolve.

Perhaps the preparation of the world inside which their mind may function with some efficiency, perhaps the preparation, I say, is more than a preparation.

Perhaps it is the real world of man.

2

With or without scientific results, man has to live in peace.

And to establish peace is a little more complicated than a scientist takes for necessary. The necessities that have to be solved, have to be done, have to be accomplished before man can even begin to think, himself, we now try to discuss a little bit more.

3

And the island of Delos is exactly our own island. If we could ourselves now be flown to Delos, we would understand why the architects have gathered there to consider how a city should be built for man nowadays and in the future.

Because there is no city on the island of Delos. There is no habitation.

The architects who met there from the rest of the world had to live on board ship. They only met on the holy ground of the temple of Apollo, because it was never a city.

4

#### *THE STORY OF THE ISLAND OF DELOS*

The island of Delos has never been a Greek polis.

However, the interesting fact about the island of Delos is that 256 Greek cities were founded, invoking the god of the island of Delos. From Delos, Apollo came to Delphi. Apollo came to the Valley of Tempe. Apollo fertilized the ground around and in every Greek city. His temple was needed, because the Muses, the song of the Greek tragedy, the songs of Pindar, the hymns at the great festivals of Greece, in Olympia, and on the isthmus of Corinth were sung under the protection of the god who had no city of his own, but who was the protector of every city in Greece, and in the great sea

which Hölderlin has immortalized in his "*Archipelagus*."

III

1

You have to be somewhere else before the outer world will bow to your will. Your peace has to be inside a community, which is perhaps unseen and invisible, but so firmly believed in that the floods of the sea, and the hailstones on land, and the snow of the winter, on the Parnassus, or on the Olympus will not frighten you.

*You can brave nature only if your own mind is outside nature.*

2

This has been the great experience of Greece.

And to this day, anybody revering the fruits of the Greek spirit revealing art and science -- and arts and sciences in the plural, too -- must go to some island of Delos, must hold a conference where no work is done, where he is inside the mind's life only, and can look *passively, quietly, peacefully* on nature in its *wild storms, and unrest, and irregularities*.

3

The architects who meet at Delos prepare themselves in the best possible way for founding the city of man, because they consciously and deliberately dwell in the same manner as the pilots and sailors of antiquity: on board ship.

They are moving outside the land in order to cultivate the land.

4

You have to have this famous Archimedean point outside the universe before you can lift the universe out of its order.

IV

1

This is too simple, perhaps, to be considered by a learned man.

But the unlearned man, who is not sharing this community *of peace, and leisure, and contemplation, and scientific record*; who is not a part of the progress of science; who is not baptized in the name of Newton, and Cartesius, and the great mathematicians of the last three hundred years, he has not this peace of mind. He does not live on Delos. He lives in the crowded city of man.

He goes mad from the bedlam of the stock exchange. He may be hankering for this peace on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. But during the week, he is exposed to something that borders -

oh, no, that *is* anarchy.

2

It is this anarchy which we now must try to contemplate, to analyze.

Usually man is not on the island of Delos.

Let this be our starting point.

If he is not on such an island, which precedes the habitation, the peaceful order of our work, and our leisure, and our holidays, and our workdays, where is he?

He is torn.

3

Every word we say has some meaning inherited from the past.

We are our parents' and our grandparents' children. Our own name, our mother tongue has molded us.

Our mother tongue is not our mother's tongue -- may I say this in passing? -- but it is the tongue which has molded our own consciousness. The mother tongue is the womb of time out of which we ourselves have received anything we know about ourselves.

We are told that we are living in this country. We are told that our parents were not Americans -- they really are, most of our friends here. We are told, we are told, and we believe.

And if we do not believe, we go crazy, because then we do no longer know who we are.

4

The first condition of man is that he must believe what he is told about himself. He must believe that his name is his name.

### *THE STORY OF OEDIPUS*

*And there is the great tragedy of the Greek stage, in Athens, on Oedipus, says, "I am Oedipus, because I am called Oedipus."*

It's pretty strange. Because: Are you Oedipus because you are called Oedipus? How far are you? What's in a name?

## CHAPTER TWO: NAMES

I

1

Well, unfortunately there is very much in a name.

### *THE STORY OF JESUS*

It took Jesus a whole life before He ceased to be called a Jew. It is a victory of His whole life that we all guarantee, and warrant - and that in this respect, even the Jews admit that Christianity is a reality- that Christ, through His crucifixion, ceased to be Jew.

He was something different.

2

You may argue who He was, what He was. But He has ceased to be a Jew.

It took Him a whole life, however, and it took Him His voluntary sacrifice of His life to get rid of this sacred heritage.

Because who we are is our way of feeling consecrated. It is something sacred, if I accept what I am told to be.

3

Only consecrated things, consecrated verities, consecrated states can be desecrated. And sometimes they have to be.

### *THE STORY OF PRINCE DE ROHAN*

There is a famous scene in a novel by a Swiss author, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, where the Prince Rohan who for the first time wrote a book on the interest of the princes and of world politics, where he is faced with the necessity of deviating from the orders of his king in France, and enable the Grisons, the Swiss in eastern Switzerland, to free themselves from the Spanish yoke, in a manner different from what the king of France had foreseen. The king, in a rage, sends a special ambassador to bring the Prince de Rohan to his senses. And the ambassador comes, listens to Rohan's propositions, and says, "That's not the way a Frenchman can speak."

Rohan answers, and makes a movement towards his heart. He knew it for a long time, but nobody had told him that he has lost his country.

You lose your country when a man tells you, "That's not the way a Frenchman speaks." He has ceased to be a Frenchman.

Prince Rohan two years later was shot at the siege of a fortress in Germany, fighting against his fatherland, fighting on the Protestant side.

4

That is, he ceased to think that the names that are spread over us are eternal.

We may change our allegiance. We may emigrate from our own country and come to this country as immigrants, and then we receive a new status in pieces.

We may keep our Catholic religion -- as the Irish or the French Canadian will carefully do --but we become Americans.

II

1

Now I am not coping here with the degrees by which the wholeness of our inherited naming and identification shifts. It goes in degrees, and it goes in decimals; but the process itself is balanced by the acquisition of new titles, of new names.

They come from the future. They come from what we wish for our children and grandchildren to achieve.

2

So the long way from somewhere in the past, of St. Patrick -- on St. Patrick's Day still celebrated in New York every year in March, is balanced by the tremendous hopes which we try to give to our grandchildren, that one of them might become mayor of New York one day, or president of the United States.



## THE STORY OF THE KENNEDY FAMILY

And as you well know, in the Kennedy family, just this whole length backward and forward has made its appearance in the flesh. For the first time, a mere immigrant, not a member of the Protestant fortress, or citadel, has become president, unifying the record of a thousand years in Europe and the hopes for a thousand years to come.

3

The summary of all this is rather important.

*Man is an heir and an ancestor.*

*As far as he is an heir, he has to believe that what he is told about himself is true.*

*As far as an ancestor, he must not believe that anything said about him has to remain true. It may be transformed.*

4

Then man is not so much a transformer, but somebody to be transformed.

Both his beginning and his heritage, however, and his future and his destiny, are valid. And they contradict each other in nearly any case we know of. They have to contradict each other, because the future must not look like the past.

The only identity between past and future is established as soon as you understand that once your past was the result of a transformation, and once you also understand that you, as a transformed being, still will have to be inherited, will have to be gratefully remembered as an ancestor - ancestor and heir then are on both sides to be recognized as real.

III

1

Man lives then in two times, from two times, on two times: the past and the future.

And what we call "the present" now, which most people in their glib talk as scholars and scientists -- which I think is a very superficial and a very damaging

talk -- take the present for granted. And about the future and the past, they go on research.

It's absolutely unnecessary to do so. Everybody knows his destiny, and everybody knows his origin. But he doesn't know what he has to do in the present. Because the present is the collision between the two demands made on us: from the past, from the days of Adam; and from the last day of judgment, upon us.

2

Into what do I have to be transformed in order to face *this division, this tension, this polarity*, between my inheritance and between my destiny?

We call this very unhappy conflict "the present." The present does not exist for people who deny their past, or who don't care for their future. The present is only there where our heart is able to stand the conflict between breathing out and breathing in, between its own *origin, past, ancestry*, and its destiny as an ancestor of a future, a new type of man.

3

What we have achieved here is not so little, because we have denied the greatest lie of modern, natural man. As long as you think that man is by nature man, and not by inheritance and by faith -- faith in the future, faith in his origin -- as soon as you believe that there is a natural mind, you are apt to say that the present exists.

4

#### *THE STORY OF LA PLACE*

The worst heresy I've ever heard printed was printed and written by the famous La Place, a mathematician in France 150 years ago, when he wrote that the future was the result of the past and the present.

As soon as a man believes such nonsense, he can no longer think straight in any political question. He may be a good mathematician, but he certainly is an ass in politics, or in religion.

## IV

## 1

Because as soon as you no longer know that the present results from the conflict of the future and the past, you have no future. Because then you try to deduce, to make the future dependent on the past. And the result must be either romanticism, or reactionalism, or certainly some superstition of the worst kind.

You deny your one quality by which you have the right

*to beget children,  
to educate grandchildren,  
to found a university,  
or to become a professor.*

## 2

Now all the people who are attached and devoted to this very heresy of Mr. La Place usually are professors.

So you can see the terrible situation in which we find ourselves, that the professors, who should be responsible for a free future, believe that the future is a result.

***But the future is our own exultation and not a result of the past.***

You must be able to exult over your right to re-create the world, for future is future.

As long as your future is the result of the past and the present, in the heretical sense of the mathematicians, it has ceased to be the future. It is nothing but the repetition of the conditions of the past.

## 3

And therefore, the world of historicism, the world of repetition, the world of mechanism has no future. It denies the future. Wherever the future is meant to be the result, it can never originate *in you new thought, and a discovery, an invention.*

### *THE STORY OF MR. EINSTEIN*

When Mr. Einstein discovered the principle of relativity, it was in opposition to everything thought before, and not as a result of the past.

*Any original thinker knows that he has to jump.*

Later you can build bridges. And you can prove that his idea, his thought was necessary for the times.

4

Only the beautiful things about all the necessary things in our history are that at one time they were thought impossible.

The necessary is always the one thing that has been deemed to be impossible until it was done.

#### *THE STORY OF THE BRIDGE IN THE URNERTAL*

Like the bridge in the Urnertal, on the Gotthard, which seemed impossible before one man did it, and hung it up there on chains outside the tunnel.

CHAPTER THREE: TWO SPACES, TWO TIMES

I

1

Something very parallel to this correction of your usual ideas about past and future has now to be done with the help of the island of Delos again.

It is much simpler to state this other fact.

The other fact is that there never is the space inside which the physicist experiments, unless he has formed this inner community of friends, of peace, of quiet and fearless leisure, from which he can view the wilds of nature in peace and harmony with other minds.

2

"Inner space" is perhaps the most correct and clearest expression to bring you to your senses, in the literal sense of the word, that you can only unify *your, mine, thine, everybody's* senses inside a peaceful gathering of minds on the island of Delos.

Delos is so fit for a conference of thinkers on settlements, because it is no settlement.

3

In other terms, the inner space of humanity must always be a holiday, a holy place.

And holy is nothing but a place exempt from your own planning; exempt from your own doing; exempt from your own *noise, fear, passion, greed, will, energy, and mission*.

***The missionary must meet in a sanctuary.***

There has been in Germany a lively discussion about this very question: how much must the leaders of a movement remain gathered in a sanctuary which is not painted, equipped, and similar to the field of the activities outside?

It's an eternal question: how far is a robber baron obliged to imitate the life of the workers which he hires? How much is a clergyman required to share the daily life of his sheep?

A bad conscience always says: the leader must live the life of the led.

Trust, confidence always wants the leader to live the life that is most suitable to equip him for the great effort of his spirit, to come into the common-day world and change it.

4

Now this is an eternal battle, and you see it today fought out between the businessman and the manager.

The manager has a fiction very often that he is just an employee. He isn't. He is the man who can employ people, and that needs qualities that have to be developed by going on a hunt in Canada, perhaps -- preferably to sitting at a typewriter or in a telephone booth.

It's an eternal question that inner space should not be treated like outer space.

II

1

### *THE STORY OF THE ROYAL MINSTER IN MESCHEDÉ*

Now in Meschede, in Westphalia, they have fought it out and have said, "Our church at home, the Royal Minster in Meschede, Westphalia, cannot be beautiful enough for these poor missionaries outside. They must have this consolation: that the star of Bethlehem is already golden, and shining at home, while we are trying to make it visible outside in the dark clouds and fogs of benighted paganism."

2

Inner and outer space are as opposite as present and future. The inner space must be left free from everyday work. The outer space must be filled with results, with fruits, with work.

3

If you now draw the conclusion from our differentiation between outer and inner space, and forward and backward time, then you see that we must perhaps be rather radical.

We have to rob the physicist of his theft. He has stolen the word "future."

Hence I prefer the word "forward" and the word "backward" for "past" and "future" nowadays.

Otherwise, the people who have denigrated "future" into a mere consequence of past and present may not know that we are opposing them, that they have to drop their wrong connotation.

4

Once a word is misused, it is very hard to restore it to its proper senses.

So if you would be good enough to think that future is nothing but time realized as beckoning us from the end of time, and past is nothing but origins conditioning us ourselves from the beginning of time, we then may perhaps allow the physicists to carry on their wrong usage of the terms "past," "present," and "future."

The same is true about inner and outer space.

III

1

What is left now is to unify the inner and outer, and the backward and forward into a form.

I have called it *the Cross of Reality*.

### *THE STORY OF BLACKBOARDS*

I do this with some hesitation, because I hate blackboards. All blackboards are two-dimensional only, and therefore they always reduce the fourfold reality to something abstract, of only two dimensions. I hate blackboards, as other people hate billboards.

I am a conservationist of reality as they are conservational of the good nature. They want to forbid billboards on the highway. And I would like to forbid blackboards on the highway of the human spirit.

2

The reason for this is that if you reduce my figure of the *Cross of Reality* to a scheme, it is just one scheme among others. All propositions on the real man -

and we are trying here to cope with the real man, in his phases *of shock, of fear, of fright, of peace, of energy, of creativity* -- all these descriptions of man must take time themselves.

The terrible thing about the blackboard is not that it is two-dimensional in space, but that it takes no time to look at it. You forget that even to understand a blackboard picture really does take time. It may be a second; it may be half a second. But still, you yourself also have to give something of your real life in order to understand it.

And since people are so very proud in their endeavor to put everything in a figure, in a picture, they forget that a part of their life is used up in going in this direction, in understanding this picture.

3

And once you forget the necessity of giving your own time to this kind of contemplation, it becomes too cheap. You think that you are outside time while thinking. Thinking then seems to be anchored in eternity, in a timeless irreality.

What you call "thinking," or what you call "idealism," or what you call your "philosophy," seems not to use up a part of your very short-lived and very measured lifetime.

4

That is not true.

The *Cross of Reality*, which discriminates between forward and backward, and inward and outward, for any possible thought process of a human mind, would be falsified if you would forget that to establish such a cross of reality in itself is a temporary action, which will take a real effort of your lifetime.

IV

1

Augustine then perhaps has formulated it better than anybody else, in his wild, African, passionate manner. He has said, "*the Cross itself must be crucified.*"

I like to conclude my attempt to give you this reform of the usual thought of man about his time and his space in this succinct formula:

*the Cross itself must be crucified.*



2

It may warn you against all scheming on blackboards. It may show you that in order to get orientation, man must already have faith, that there is time to get this orientation.

As soon as a man is not mentally *mad, harried, chased* by a persecution mania, by the idea there is no time for him, that he has to do it all in a hurry, immediately -- as soon as you wake up to this fact that all peace of mind already is a gift of our community to you as an individual person, the peace that transcends all reasoning will become something very real to you, your share in the re-creation of the time process.

3

In as much as you give time to establishing this understanding, you are already a member of the great society, inside which you at this moment are contributing this way of trying to master time, and to master space, by distributing your energies in the right manner to

*that much past,  
and that much future,  
and that much inside,  
and that much outer technology.*

4

The tension between technology and what you call "basic science" nowadays, and the difference between politics and history, or knowledge on the other hand, is not only never in the balance, but it has always to be rightened by you yourself. And in knowing that to think means to contribute to the political order of the society, you rediscover that to think is already a participation in the whole of the community.

***You either establish peace or you establish war when you think.***

CHAPTER FOUR: LATIN FORMULAS

I

1

Because you either try to be understood and you give time to your being understood; or you decide, as the existentialists, or the man who just throws oil in his piano, that you don't want to be understood, and will contribute to the anarchy or the civil war of mankind.

2

This is now not the time to go into the details of how this *Cross of Reality* has worked out, and has been dealt with in the life of every important human being.

I have shown in the life of the Count of Saint-Simon, the first sociologist, how he discovered for his own life and his own works this same law.

Hence I will be brief now and only sum up for experts in philosophy, or in theology, or in sociology our results.

3

They may be summed up in two categorical statements.

The first can be formulated as follows:

the Cartesian and Kantian illusion has been the usage of the singulars -- space and time. Neither space nor time are ever given to man in the singular. Spaces exist only in their dichotomy of inner and outer space; times only are found whenever we risk our "*torn to pieces*," as William James has called this -- and the fact that we always face backward and forward simultaneously.

The second statement protects our minds against all monomaniac statements as the Cartesian "Cogito ergo sum," or the Marxian, "We have nothing to lose but our chains."

The second statement stresses instead the equality of the claims of the four crucial commands on us.

4

Any man is perpetually in a crucial situation, for he must move between four efforts, which all are inescapable, and ask to be expressed at times in terms as follows.

*One:* I can be measured in terms of quantity; hence I am somebody, something.

*Second:* I can measure quantities, hence I am -- the famous Cartesian "Cogito ergo sum."

*Third:* I can carry out orders, hence I am a part of the whole.

And *fourth:* I can respond to new situations by being transformed, hence again, I am not just somebody but this man, this unique man.

II

1

Unless we decide perpetually between these four ways of being, truth loses our hold on us. Only those who fight for the future, for the past, for the outer order, and the inner peace, alternately, may represent the spirit in man.

Those on the other hand, who only recognize one of these four arms of the cross -- or two, perhaps -- one of these four ways into reality, may be clever, may be intelligent, may be efficient, may be an authority, but they have no spiritual life.

2

I may put it at the end our statements and the result of our thinking in four brief Latin formulas.

Descartes has said, "*Cogito ergo sum.*"

The things may say, the masses may claim *mensurari possum, quia sum.*" Marx would speak this way, and the materialists.

The Old Testament says *audio ut sim*, "I must hearken to God's voice before I come into being."

And the New Testament says, *Respondeo etsi mutabor.*"

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**SENTENCES**

Any original thinker knows that he has to jump.

But the future is our own exultation and not a result of the past.

Man is an heir and an ancestor. As far as he is an heir, he has to believe that what he is told about himself is true. As far as an ancestor, he must not believe that anything said about him has to remain true. It may be transformed.

The missionary must meet in a sanctuary.

You can brave nature only if your own mind is outside nature.

You either establish peace or you establish war when you think.

## NOTE BY THE EDITOR

This is the edited transcription of one lecture July 1965.

1

The transcription was made by Frances Huesy - my work are the following changes:

1. Commonplace phrases as "you see", "so to speak" are eliminated. Where the speaker corrects himself within the same sentence, only the corrected version is kept.

2. *Additions:*

paragraphs,

chapters with titles scooped from the text,

Roman numbers for the four parts of a chapter,

Arabic numbers for the four parts of the parts of a chapter,

titles for the stories - which are marked by color - which communicate either a personal or historical event,

sentences are marked in bold print, which are as a sum of thought and to be kept as taken for themselves,

indices of contents, names, stories, sentences.

2

This is a single lecture - you feel that the ascertaining of the listeners is missing. And therefore this warning not to use the cross of reality as a spatial concept on the blackboard.

It is useful for all purposes of teaching the cross of reality, never to forget that even the smallest process of understanding takes time, a real part of your lifetime!

It was Franz Rosenzweig who warned his friend Eugen in his last letter to him not to give his teaching in an apparently simple form of a formula too early in the process of teaching, but as a final statement - as happened here.

I corrected the second Latin formula according to the foregoing translation:

***One: I can be measured*** in terms of quantity; hence I am somebody, something. Which has to be the passive form: The things may say, the masses may claim ***mensurari possum, quia sum.***"

Cologne, May 13, 2017

Eckart Wilkens

