

This is Chapter 2 in M. Darrol Bryant's **Woven on the Loom of Time: Many Faiths and One Divine Purpose**, New Delhi: Decent/Suryodaya Books, 1999, pp. 29 -56. It is reproduced here by permission of the author.

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**DIALOGICAL HUMANITY:  
IN THE CRUCIBLE OF TRANSCENDENCE**

The Great Tao flows everywhere.  
It may go left or right.  
All things depend on it for life,  
and it does not turn away from them.[1](#)

In the first lecture, I sought to outline several of the assumptions that inform my exploration of the theme of the Principal Miller Lectures and sketched, in an anticipatory way, the elements of our argument concerning life's purpose and meaning in relation to the Ultimate. In this lecture, I will turn to a more contemporary philosophical argument that grounds humanity in the Ultimate. The same point could have been argued on the basis of the classical religious traditions -- that we, in the language of theism, come from God and go to God, or, in the language of monism, that we are the Ultimate -- but I have chosen this more contemporary route. It too seeks to ground our vision of humanity in the Ultimate and provides us with a vision of the religious traditions as a dialogue with Transcendence.

**I.**

Let me begin by sketching the context within contemporary Western life that gave rise to the developments outlined below. Given the eclipse of Transcendence in Western intellectual life, it is not surprising that humanity has become a question to itself. Thus I want here to turn my attention to the perennial philosophical question of the nature of the human. It will be possible to adequately make a case for the religions only if we can, I believe, make the case for humanity as constituted by the Ultimate. Hence, in this lecture I want to argue, in a more philosophical idiom, for an understanding of the human as constituted by and unfolding in dialogue with Transcendence. This will be the first part of the argument for understanding the story of humankind as the encounter with the Ultimate and the centrality of the religious traditions in the making of humanity. In making this argument I will turn to the work of two figures, one Jewish, the other Christian, in the early twentieth century whose insights were partially forged in response to the challenges of modernity.

When modern existentialists spoke of the "Geworfenheit" or "thrownness" of humanity into the givens of historical time, they were prescient about the conditions of life in the twentieth century.<sup>1b</sup> As we come to the end of this tumultuous century, humanity finds itself having endured a century of unprecedented change, unspeakable horror and unrelieved erosion of traditional patterns of meaning and life. The engine of unprecedented change has been the scientific and technological innovations that have altered humanity's relation to the earth and to itself. These changes have been Janus-faced, bringing both life and death in their wake. The unspeakable horror has been the millions of lives obliterated in the mountains of Armenia, the ovens of Nazi Germany, the Gulags of the Soviet Union, the killing fields of Laos and

Cambodia, and the snow-capped lands of Tibet.<sup>2</sup> Often we have seen how new technologies of destruction have been deployed in the name of purity and progress, creating lethal marriages of technology and ideology. And the erosion of traditional patterns of meaning and life have engulfed the planet in ways that leave no corner untouched. Hurlled from their timeless life in the Kalihari Desert, the !Kung or Bushman peoples of Southern Africa are no more immune from the erosion of traditional patterns than are the most sophisticated inhabitants of Manhattan, Paris, or Tokyo.<sup>3</sup>

While I do not believe that these events have altogether consumed older patterns of meaning, like those found in the great traditions of religious life, they do point to the challenge to speak the old wisdom in new idioms that dissent from the hubris of our age.

Within the "thrownness" of our contemporary condition, some have discerned important new possibilities opened up to humanity. For example, the great Hindu philosopher S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), an Oxford Don, later President of India, and the one after whom this Institute for Advanced Studies in Philosophy is named, has remarked that the meeting of "the peoples, races, cultures and religions" of the world is the phenomenon most "characteristic of our times."<sup>4</sup> It is, he continues, a meeting that in scope, scale, and potential significance has "never before . . . taken place in the history of our world."<sup>5</sup> This meeting has been made possible, ironically, by the very technologies that have also contributed to the erosion of traditional patterns of meaning and forms of life. The point of Radhakrishnan's observation, however, is neither the uniqueness of this historical moment -- which has antecedents if not exact parallels -- nor the ironies that have given rise to this situation. The crucial question is whether we will find in this encounter and meeting of peoples our way to a deepened and transformed awareness of humanity and its transcendent grounds. In Radhakrishnan's terms, the issue is whether or not the "close neighbourhood" brought about by the conditions of modern life could be "transformed into a true brotherhood," whether or not "the world" could become "our home."<sup>6</sup> For this hope to be well founded, it must have a basis and resonance within the very nature of our humanity and the reality of the human situation.

At the heart of our tumultuous era, then, lie fundamental philosophical issues that can easily be overlooked. These are the deeper matters that, often unrecognized, underlie discussions of economic or political issues, or discussions of modernization or the transfer of technology or the challenge of democratization. All of these processes point simultaneously to dimensions of the current crisis and to the struggle for the emergence of a planetary society, one founded on the awareness of our singular planet earth. Yet beneath these issues lie deeper philosophical matters that are provoked by these events. For we must also ask about the human beings and communities that find themselves caught up in these events. Thus the issue we will explore here is more obscure than these front page issues but equally significant. For at the inner heart of our emerging planetary society stands the question of the human itself. Who are we? What are we becoming? Can we rightly grasp the human except in relation to the Ultimate? What are the grounds that can sustain our quest for wholeness, community, and transcendence?

Early in this century, the question that humanity had become to itself led some European thinkers to a profound exploration of the dialogical foundations of humanity, a dialogue rooted in Transcendence. Their view of the life of humanity as dialogue provides a way into our thesis

concerning the purpose and meaning of the human quest. It allows the religious pathways to come into view as integral to the divine dialogue of the Ultimate with humankind. It allows us to see the importance of the meeting of peoples and the contemporary interreligious encounter and dialogue. Although that dimension of our dialogical humanity has yet to penetrate the contours of global perception or the front pages of the daily newspapers, it has begun to silently transform the hearts and minds of human beings around the globe. Interreligious dialogue reveals that an aspect of the life of dialogue is the dialogue between religions. And at the heart of that meeting is the question of the meaning of the multiform traditions in relation to Transcendence/God/the Absolute. The conviction that human life is constituted by Transcendence is a commonplace of the great traditions and grounds our contention of unanimity among traditions concerning the common destiny of humanity in Transcendence. But it also raises the question of the meaning of those multiform traditions in relation to each other and the Ultimate.

As I have already indicated, the jury is still very much out on the question of whether or not this encounter of peoples will issue in a new world for humanity. Far too often, the results seem disastrous as these meetings of peoples, fueled by political and economic rivalries and the modern presumption to mastery over nature and humanity, lead to animosity and hostility. But this is neither the whole story nor its most telling aspect. What is most needed is some orientation in the midst of our shared situation towards what Radhakrishnan called this "characteristic phenomenon" of our time. That orientation can arise from a deepened awareness of the dialogical structures of humanity itself as constituted by Transcendence.

The way to a deepened awareness of the dialogical structure of humanity has already been opened by two remarkable figures who earlier in the century pioneered the way in understanding dialogue. Here we wish to outline the philosophical anthropology that emerged in the work of these two pioneers. This will provide us with a grounding for our approach to the religious life of humankind and a foundation to further explore our thesis that the story of humankind is the making of humanity. Their philosophical anthropology also sheds light on our question of the destiny of humankind.

## II.

The two pioneers in articulating a dialogical philosophical anthropology of humanity are Martin Buber (1878-1967) and Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy (1888-1973). Buber is well known for his book *Ich und Du*, translated as *I and Thou*. First published in 1923, the work has influenced a generation of western philosophy and Jewish and Christian theology.<sup>7</sup> Rosenstock-Huussy, on the other hand, has remained little known despite a corpus running to more than seven hundred books and articles.<sup>8</sup> Both had received classical German educations; both were profoundly shaken by the 1st World War, the collapse of German culture and the profound challenges posed to Western civilization; both were part of similar circles of thought and reflection in post-war Germany; both had a Jewish ancestry although Rosenstock-Huussy became a Christian in his teens, while Buber became one of the most influential and well-known Jewish voices of our century. The significant point of intersection in their lives was what was then called their "speech-thinking" or what I am calling here their shared dialogical anthropology.

Although both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy had drunk deeply in their own ways at the fountains of German idealism, they shared the conviction that the philosophical traditions of German idealism were not adequate to grasp the human conditions disclosed by the War and the collapse of European culture. Both were more sensitive to humanity's embeddedness in time and the sequence of generations than were those German and European idealists who treated humanity as a disembodied ego. As Rosenstock-Huessy wrote in the "Epilogue: The Survival Value of Humor" in his monumental work *Out of Revolution, Autobiography of Western Man*:

My generation has survived pre-War decadence, the killing in the War, post-War anarchy, and revolutions, i.e., civil war. Today, before anybody awakens to conscious life in this narrowed world, unemployment, or airbomb-strafting, or class-revolutions, or lack of vitality, or lack of integration may have cast the die of his fate, and stamped him forever. We daily emerge out of social death by a miracle. Hence, we no longer care for Cartesian metaphysics . . . . We are groping for a social wisdom that leads beyond the brutal "nomical" facts of economics and the monstrosities of the social volcano. [9](#)

And similarly, in *Ich und Du*, Buber eschews a separate "world of ideas" and, instead, insists that he speaks of "nothing else but the real man, of you and of me, of our life and of our world--not of an I, or a state of being in itself alone." [10](#)

Both were persuaded that an adequate understanding of humanity must resonate in the lived experience of humanity as well as arise from attention to the unfolding life of humanity. These twin considerations turned their attention away from humanity absorbed in self-reflection or the Cartesian formula that affirmed "I think therefore I am" and towards humanity in its relation life of being-with the earth, humanity, and the Ultimate.

Though Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy had shared the depths of the inhumanity revealed by the war, for neither did that horrendous experience utter the last word. Rather, it disclosed the necessity to turn again to fundamental questions to wrest anew the wisdom that was to be found at life's depths. Thus in philosophical and theological circles, just as in the realms of the arts, politics, and sciences, there was a reopening of fundamental questions in post-War Germany and across Europe. When Heidegger asserts in *Being and Time* that "it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being," [11](#) he speaks not only for himself but for his moment in the cultural life of post-War Europe. Humanity had become a question to itself, and it was thus essential to arrive at a renewed understanding of the human. Only that philosophical or existential wisdom could begin to point in another direction beyond the impasse of the moment. Yet it was essential that such wisdom be rooted in a profound understanding of humanity and the human venture, embodying the very depths of human nature.

That new direction was, curiously as we shall see, consonant with the oldest and deepest insights of Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy's respective traditions of faith, insights that had been eclipsed in modernity's affirmation of humanity's autonomy and mastery over nature. Indeed, it was these neglected sources of insight that provided the inspiration that gave rise to their shared vision of humanity as (1) constituted by the Divine and (2) grounded in and coming to be through dialogue. For both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, dialogue was not one among many human activities, nor mere academic exchange. Rather, in their understanding, life was dialogue.

Dialogue was the name for the deepest and most profound relationship of humanity to reality.

While it is not possible here to explore in detail their respective understandings of dialogical humanity or to convey all the nuances of the differences in their views, it is possible to highlight three of the essential insights that emerge from their work. Those insights cluster around the themes of (1) the transcendent or divine presence which funds dialogue, (2) the centrality of dialogue to human life, and (3) the relational character of humanity as unfolded in time and space. Let us look at each of these in turn.

*The Transcendent Presence:* Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy shared with modern existentialists the philosophical presupposition that the analysis of the human condition must resonate with the actual experience of humanity. Yet there is a fundamental disagreement between Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy and the so-called secular existentialists like Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre. That disagreement concerns the constitution of that reality within which humanity finds itself. Are we here dealing with the classical metaphysical question of God/humanity/world or is it a question of humanity/world? This question is much disputed in relation to Heidegger: some read him with a Transcendent, others without. With Sartre, the issue is clearer: there is no transcendent or divine dimension. For Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, humanity's life is life in relation to the Transcendent and the world. These three terms are not to be understood as pointing to three distinct realms or watertight compartments, nor should they be separated from the life experience they seek to evoke. For Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, humanity finds itself in the given texture of the life of families, of societies, of traditions, of nature, and the Transcendent. And that Ultimate is simultaneously both other and present to our textured life in time.

One does not find traditional ontological or cosmological arguments on behalf of Transcendence in either Buber or Rosenstock-Huessy; indeed, both eschew such arguments as fruitless. Buber, for example, asserts that "the Eternal Thou can by its nature not become It. . . ." <sup>12</sup> Buber sees the process of reflection as inevitably transforming "realities" into objects and thus distorting the reality of the human situation and that with which we have to do. Rather, Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy turn to the analysis of the human experience of life itself, especially in society and speech, to disclose its relation to Transcendence as the constituent ground of the phenomenon of humanity itself. As Buber was to remark in utter simplicity, "living means being addressed." <sup>13</sup> But the question of the source of this "address" is what divides Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy from others within the existentialist movement with whom they shared a great deal. <sup>14</sup>

For Buber, it is this Transcendent Presence which is the basis for his description of human life as "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationships. Our humanity comes to be in response to the address of the Ultimate to be and become. For Rosenstock-Huessy "God is the I that always precedes our existence and the existence of our fellow creatures." <sup>15</sup> And in his "grammar" of human existence, humanity is "the second person." <sup>16</sup> Buber remarks that "meeting with God does not come to [man] in order that he may concern himself with God, but in order that he may confirm that there is meaning in the world." <sup>17</sup> While Rosenstock-Huessy shares this basic view, he is critical of the formulation "I-Thou." For Rosenstock-Huessy, this formulation obscures the precedence of the Divine Thou in the emergence of the I and the dynamic quality of the

divine/human relation. It would be better to speak of Thou-I since it is the Divine that constitutes the Self, not the other way around. Rosenstock-Huessy was later to remark that Buber had spoken "too early," before the insights that were emerging in post-War Germany had fully ripened.<sup>18</sup> At the very least, Rosenstock-Huessy thought that the order of the formulation should be reversed -- Thou-I rather than I-Thou -- to underscore the awareness that the self comes to be in response to the reality Beyond -- mediated through mothers and fathers, communities and traditions -- which addresses us from the moment of our beginnings in time. In Rosenstock-Huessy's words:

In our natural situation, that of being an addressee, we are neither active like the over-energetic Ego nor passive like the suffering under-dog. We are swimmers in a buoyant and everlasting medium. The dawn of creation is upon us, and we await our question, our specific mandate, in the silence of the beginnings of time. When we have learned to listen to the question and serve towards its solution, we have advanced to a new day."<sup>19</sup>

Thus if we fail to grasp the structure of humanity rightly, we cannot rightly understand the human situation. In the "grammar" that emerges in Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, that means that Transcendence is the first person of a grammar of the human.

The metaphor of "grammar" is important here since both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy eschewed idealist metaphysics for elevating thought over the actual. In Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy's hands, the quest for wisdom -- philosophia -- involved turning to life itself to uncover the dynamics and structures present to the human engagement with reality. Rosenstock-Huessy especially likened the task to that of the student of speech and language who seeks to become aware of the dynamics and structure of language -- its grammar. But it is essential to remember that speaking and listening -- the reality of language -- precedes the grasp of its grammar just as here life itself precedes, and continually funds, the awareness and articulation of life's dynamics and structure: what we call here its grammar. Within this philosophical frame, dialogue as the relationship with reality always takes precedence over the articulation of that relationship in a "grammar." And the first person of that grammar that we find in Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy is the Transcendent, the Absolute, God.

Consequently, ours is not merely being-unto-death, as Heidegger suggested, but it is being-in-response to the address that comes through life itself. Nor is that "address" -- what Heidegger called "Ruf" -- which addresses humanity simply humanity itself, as Heidegger argued.<sup>20</sup> For Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, we are addressed by the Beyond. In Buber's words, "In the signs of life which happens to us we are addressed. Who speaks?" And Buber's answer is this: "If we name the speaker of this speech God, then it is always the God of the moment, a moment God."<sup>21</sup> Buber's formulation is important in that it emphasizes that God is not an object of thought, but a presence that "speaks." Moreover, God is "a moment God" meaning that the Divine discloses itself in the moment of address, of meeting, of dialogue; God is not static in relation to humanity. This understanding does not mean, however, that Buber is anticipating process theology and its notion of a changing God. Rather, Buber's point is the dynamic of God for humanity: humanity finds itself in being addressed by Transcendence, and in response to that address, comes to be in an unfolding historical destiny. That destiny unfolds across generations, and it arises from the nexus of address and response.

What is significant here is the way in which Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy portray the human situation. Humanity does not come to be in an empty universe but in one constituted by Transcendence. This relational ontology is constitutive of humanity as such. Thus at the heart of humanity lies the call to be and become not merely in relation to what is at hand or in terms of the present moment of technical society and its claims on our being and becoming, but in relation to the deeper ground of authentic life in the present in response to the Beyond. The present and the Beyond are not severed nor separated in Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy. They are interrelated moments in the dynamic unfolding of life; they constitute the fundamental terms in the grammar of life itself.

Although we have here focused on the divine-human relationship, the "world" is implicitly present in its two-fold meaning. "World" is the name we give to both the realm of nature and to social reality.<sup>21b</sup> For both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, the disorientation and turmoil that had overwhelmed Europe required an analysis that addressed the foundations of that disease rather than the symptoms. It is this fundamental analysis that is lacking in contemporary western philosophy and is being eroded by the impact of the western sciences and technologies of mastery that presume that the world exists from itself alone, an erosion that ends in nihilism. Once, however, the divine-human structure of human being is brought to the fore, then the world can come into proper view.

*Dialogical Humanity:* If, as Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy argued, the human situation is rightly portrayed as one constituted by humanity-in-relation to Transcendence, then we can understand why dialogue becomes the name for the life of humanity. For in this account of things, humanity unfolds in a dialogical relationship with the divine, the world, and the human. But of course this way of putting the matter is misleading: the clarity and sequence of the terms belies the all-at-onceness of the experience of life. Few knew this problem better than Rosenstock-Huessy who attempted in his grammar of human life to respect simultaneously the particular in the universal and vice versa. Both Rosenstock-Huessy and Buber recognized that humanity does not move in a neat or ordered way from the divine to the world and to one another. Rather, we, as particular human beings and communities, find ourselves emerging in the complex emotional dynamics of family life attempting to discern there the words that make for life and growth. We are in the midst of larger social institutions and processes and are there deluged with claims and counter-claims of what makes for significant living. We find ourselves as members of political societies with their claims for the appropriate ways to use and deploy power. We find ourselves caught up in the vicissitudes of our historical moment and its insights and pretenses. Which claims are to be acknowledged, which rejected, which ignored? But switching our focus from the general to the particular does not alter the essential philosophical point, though it does complicate and texture it. That point is the dialogical character of the human situation.

Few have been able to unfold the dialogical character of the human situation as ably as Rosenstock-Huessy. Unfortunately, we can only hint at that achievement here. To begin, it is important to note that his is a more complex grammar of dialogical humanity than Buber's. Buber's two-foldedness -- I-Thou, I-It -- becomes four-foldedness in Rosenstock-Huessy -- humanity in dialogue with the Future, Past, Inner, and Outer fronts of life. For Rosenstock-Huessy, that dialogue of humanity with life and its transcendent foundation unfolds in a four-fold

or cruciform structure, pattern, and dynamic.<sup>22</sup> Humanity is, in his view, faced inward and outward, forward and backward simultaneously. Each of these fronts of life -- in space from within to without, in time from backward to forward -- confronts the human with the demands of dialogue. In time, we are confronted with the question of what from the past we must hold on to and what we must let go of; in our response to these challenges, we write the story of our generation and era. Similarly, in space we turn in to the demands of the self and out to the realm of nature and society. And here too we must respond to the claims that come to us from within and without. Thus Rosenstock-Huessy's formula for humanity's dialogue with itself, others and nature, the past and the future, the heavens and the earth, is "respondeo etsi mutabor": I respond although I will be changed.<sup>23</sup>

The dialogical character of human being and becoming is, as we have already shown, unfolded in the order of space and time. Indeed, it is basic to life itself. Thus Buber remarked that,

The life of dialogue is no privilege of intellectual activity like dialectic. It does not begin in the upper story of humanity. It begins no higher than where humanity begins. There are not gifted and ungifted here, only those who give themselves and those who withhold themselves."<sup>23b</sup>

While Buber tended to focus more on the dialogue between "I" and "Thou," Rosenstock-Huessy gave more attention to the dialogical character of human life as it unfolds in space and time. That unfolding is neither automatic nor mechanical but passes through the human person who responds in countless varieties of ways. The point here is not those varieties but rather the relationships that are given in the life of humanity.

For dialogical humanity, meaning grows out of the life of dialogue with Transcendence, the world, and other human beings. Meaning is constituted by relationships rather than concepts. When humanity finds itself in vital relationships with the Transcendent, mediated through communities of faith, or through the world given to us in creation and society, or through the other as humanity in its gender and cultural diversity, then life becomes awash with meaning. But when humanity is experienced as isolated in a silent cosmos, or as alienated from the worlds of society and creation, or as alone in relation to the other, then meaning evaporates and our humanity shrinks. It is relation that bestows meaning.

Thus our dialogical humanity is constituted by dialogue and relation. Indeed, these are so deeply intertwined that it is only for purposes of analysis that they can be distinguished. Hence the discussion of the centrality of dialogue to the human venture leads inextricably into an outline of relational humanity.

*Relational Humanity:* The centrality of relationship to the philosophical anthropology of both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy is immediately obvious in the classic statement with which Buber opens **Ich und Du**:

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is



the combination I-Thou.

The other primary word is the combination I-it...[24](#)

Thus the formulations "I-Thou" and "I-It" entered the language of philosophical anthropology. In his early writing, Buber's I-Thou/I-It come to signify two basic attitudes towards life as well as the twofold relationship to life present in/to every human being. This relational understanding of the human was fundamental to both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy's work, even though the latter would speak of those relationships, as we have already indicated, in a more differentiated way.

Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy saw the profound limitations of a philosophical tradition founded on the Cartesian dictum that because we think we are. They did, however, share with Hegel an awareness of the horizon of temporality and with Nietzsche a concern for the living moment. But Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy brought to their analysis of these themes a distinctive awareness that was rooted in their sensitivity to speech as the vital key to living humanity. It was precisely speech in its particularity -- rather than reflection in its generality -- that embodied humanity's response to the historical moment in which life in all its wretchedness and glory was being unfolded.

For Buber, it was a two-fold humanity; for Rosenstock-Huessy it was a four-fold humanity. For Buber, the human either faced the mystery of the Thou or lived in the world of It. Despite Buber's efforts to acknowledge something valid in the "I/It" relation, it always comes through as second best and lacking in its basic character. For Rosenstock-Huessy, our relationships extend without and within in space, forward and backward in time as well as above and below into the eternal. This remarkably enriched account of the relational character of the human points to the many fronts of dialogue that arise at the many fronts of life. When the multiplicity, or in Rosenstock-Huessy's preferred word, the multiformity of humanity is unfolded, then our awareness deepens. Humanity is not just this one thing, but a constellation of relationships that spans the relation we have to ourselves, to the relationship we have to the earth, and the relationship we have with those who came before us and those who will come after us. It is when humanity is thus restored to the multiform relations of life that meaning can emerge. Alienated from those life forms and patterns of exchange between humanity and life, humanity becomes a stranger to itself. Lost in the world of abstractions rather than enmeshed in a life of thought, alienated in a world of commodities rather than alive in a world of exchange, caught in the merry-go-rounds of emotional trauma rather than flowing with the movement of life, humanity becomes estranged from its moorings.

But when humanity finds itself in the world of relations, then community is given to humanity. For both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, community is not another category alongside the human but rather the inevitable form of our relational humanity.[25](#)

In both Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, then, it was humanity-in-dialogue that constituted the ground of life and the fundamental category for a philosophical anthropology. When they brought forward the centrality of dialogue to the understanding of the human, they were charting waters that had not been charted before even though they had been sounded in the religious

heritage of humankind. Although the work of Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy does not provide us with either a finished agenda or a completed map of humanity, it does provide us with a fresh articulation of an ancient wisdom: namely, that humanity is constituted by the Ultimate. Moreover, their insights into dialogical humanity allow us to begin to discern meanings and hear notes that might alter our understanding of what is unfolding in the midst of the events that shape our age. The heart of their contribution is the orientation they provide. We may not yet see clearly or face to face, but perhaps we can heed those notes that call us to take our place in the yet unfinished melody of humanity in relation to itself and that Beyond that funds it all.

### III.

Seen in the light of the dialogical account of humanity pioneered by Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy, the religious and spiritual traditions of humankind emerge as the living response of humanity's life of dialogue with the Transcendent, the Unmanifest. In that dialogue, the initiative rests as much Beyond as Within. The Transcendent has been revealed or disclosed and named in diverse names -- names that are so holy that we should tremble to even utter them -- in the manifold traditions of religious life: Yahweh, Brahman, God, Tao, Allah, Emptiness, Kitché Manitou, Ek Oankar . . . Thus the religious traditions reveal a shared awareness that humanity unfolds in dialogue with the Absolute which simultaneously exceeds the quotidian while being nonetheless present to life in time. Those dialogues with the Ultimate have been enfolded in the religious traditions of humankind. And the contemporary encounter and dialogue between religions can be seen as encountering and exploring across tradition the deepest wisdom given to humanity. But such dialogue must be, as Buber remarked, authentic:

There is genuine dialogue--no matter whether spoken or silent--where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. There is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources."[25b](#)

Genuine dialogue is an intrahuman as well as an interreligious dialogue concerning dialogue with the Ultimate. The diverse traditions have unfolded their respective grammars of their respective dialogical encounters with the Beyond. But prior to the present age, those understandings, practices, and grammars have lived in relative isolation from one another. And meeting often led to hostility. However, that isolation is increasingly broken by the social conditions of the modern and post-modern age. The irony is that within the context of a dialogical understanding of the human condition, the religious traditions need not remain isolated but can enter a fruitful relationship with one another at the deepest levels. Such an encounter and dialogue need not -- indeed, must not -- issue in syncretism or relativism but in a revitalized awareness of humanity in relation to the Divine. A post-modern necessity is an awareness of the multiform ways to live profoundly in relation to that reality which funds us, transcends us and calls us to be. The revelations of the Whole given fully in a particular Way must respect the Ways given to others.

Already in 1929, Buber had written that

A time of genuine religious conversations is beginning -- not those so-called but fictitious conversations where none regarded and addressed his partner in reality, but genuine dialogues, speech from certainty to certainty, but also from one open-hearted person to another open-hearted person. Only then will genuine common life appear, not that of an identical content of faith which is alleged to be found in all religions, but that of the situation of anguish and of expectation.<sup>26</sup>

Given the vision of dialogical humanity that we have outlined here, such a conviction is not surprising. Tragically, the emergence of Nazi Germany not only delayed those "genuine religious conversations" -- which had already begun to emerge in the relations between Jews like Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig and Christians like Rosenstock-Huessy and Joseph Wittig - - but showed the terrible price of the failure to recognize and acknowledge our dialogical humanity. As the lust for mastery over others disclosed its diabolical face, the necessity of a different understanding of humanity emerged as an imperative. The same point has been made by Richard Rubenstein in the conclusion to his important but disturbing study that chronicles the depths of inhumanity that lurk behind public policies in our century, *The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World*.

In this new political and social environment, our worst pollution may very well be what we do to ourselves. That is why a religious transformation is crucial. But, if it is to come, it must be an inclusive vision appropriate to a global civilization in which Moses and Muhammad, Christ, Buddha, and Confucius all play a role. We can no longer rest content with a humanity divided into the working and the workless, the saved and the damned, the Occident and the Orient. Our fates are too deeply intertwined.<sup>27</sup>

But for such an inclusive vision to emerge, humanity must rediscover itself in dialogue with life's depths as well as with those with whom one shares the planet. The call for religious transformation rests implicitly on a recognition of dialogical humanity.

It is appropriate that such dialogue begins between the religions as the keepers of the most profound wisdom of the dialogue between the Divine Unmanifest and humanity. The religious traditions have recognized, each in their own distinctive ways, that the experience of humanity is always revelational, that is, a disclosing. And as humanity heeds and responds, a tradition of life is called into being, a spiritual type is created. The point here is that the specific grammars, practices, and Way of a given tradition create both a specific type as well as a shared awareness that the matrix of human being and becoming is in dialogue, in the crucible of Transcendence. Such knowing is existential and spiritual rather than informational. Such knowing touches the depths of humanity and calls it into being. Already in *Ich und Du*, Buber points out that "all revelation is summons and sending."<sup>28</sup> And in Rosenstock-Huessy, it is the hearing of the Imperative that calls us into being. Hearing and heeding the Imperative, writes Rosenstock-Huessy, "the things of the world are mastered, times are decided, people are made by it."<sup>29</sup>

The classical traditions of wisdom in the East and West have placed the divine-human relationship at the heart of reality and their respective quests for wisdom. The quest for the

human is inextricably linked to the quest for the divine and the quest for the divine goes through the interior of the human. This is the wisdom that is given in that relationship known as "revelation" -- whether given in the texts of sacred scriptures or the enlightenment of the human heart. Thus the great nurseries of humankind have been the religious traditions that have addressed and shaped humanity throughout time -- and continue to do so today despite the troubling inroads of secularity. The little and great traditions form the human along the lines of what is given to them in their encounter and dialogue with the Ultimate. For the Jew, it is the revelation of the Torah and a covenanted community that lies at the heart of spiritual wisdom; for the Buddhist, it is the aspiration towards Enlightenment on the basis of meditational practice that is core to what has been given -- not as a mere set of ideas or practices but as a way to Transcendence. For the Hindu, it is the awareness that we finally move beyond dualisms to a unity with the Ultimate that transcends all divisions. And so on and so forth.

These traditions constitute the grammars of the spirit that have long turned humanity towards its deepest encounters with the real and with itself. These traditions are profound encounters with the Absolute where the disclosure reshapes humanity in the likeness and image of the Absolute given in a particular tradition. In earlier eras, the formation of the human in the image and likeness of the Absolute unfolded in isolation; now we have become aware of one another. And that continuing process of the making of humanity needs to be done in concert so that our emergent planetary humanity can heed again the call from Beyond that gives us our deepest wisdom and most abiding direction. That process within the body of humanity will be deepened as we become more attuned to the crucible of Transcendence that is at the true centre of the life of humanity. It is in that crucible that we learn anew that it is in the encounter and dialogue with Transcendence that we realize our destiny. Such an understanding of humanum has already been anticipated and marked out in the writings of pioneers like Martin Buber and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; and it is there implicitly in the great traditions of religious and spiritual life.[30](#)

## Notes to Chapter II:

[1](#). **The Way of Lao Tzu**, trans. Wing Tsit Chan, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963, #34, p. 160. I have deliberately selected a Taoist text to place at the head of this chapter in order to underscore the limitations of the term "transcendence," which I use here extensively. Transcendence is not meant as an equivalent to theistic as opposed to monistic, nor is it intended only to evoke notions of mere "over-againstness" rather than "deep withinness." I had hoped the term might allow us to avoid the dualism of theism/non-theism. But my critics in Madras made me aware that the associations the term carried overran my hopes. So, let me say that my intent is to use the term "transcendence" to point to that which is Ultimate, the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Godhead, that which is beyond all of our divisions yet funds the whole, beyond the metaphors of "over-against" and "deep within" yet embracing those metaphors as part of the human experience of that which ever exceeds all our categories yet discloses itself and shines in those very experiences of the Ultimate which are at the centre of all. The use of the Taoist text is supported by Ellen Chen's comment that in #34 and #35 the "Tao is portrayed as the principle of plentitude." She goes on to characterize the Tao as "like the Good of Plato," yet even these characterizations are not exhaustive. (See Ellen Chen's fine translation **The Tao Te Ching**, New York: Paragon Press, 1989, p. 138.) My intention here also accords with that found in *The Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius* where we read that "with regard to the supra-essential being of God -- transcendent Goodness transcendentally there -- no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being. No. It is at total remove from every condition, movement, life, imagination, conjecture, name, discourse, thought, conception, being, rest, dwelling, unity, limit, infinity, the totality of existence. And yet, since it

is the underpinning of goodness, and by merely being there is the cause of everything, to praise this divinely beneficent Providence you must turn to all of creation. It is there at the center of everything and everything has it for a destiny." (See **Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works**, The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. by Colm Luibheid, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p. 54.)

1b. Geworfenheit is Martin Heidegger's term. See **Being and Time**, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p. 174. Heidegger says that "'thrownness' is meant to suggest the 'facticity of its being delivered over,'" and goes on to characterize humanity as "Dasein," as finding "itself in its thrownness." Here, the term is used to describe the human situation, but not strictly speaking in Heidegger's technical sense.

2. See Richard L. Rubenstein, **The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World**, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, for a disturbing and comprehensive account of this horror. For a profound grappling with the agony of the contemporary Jewish community, see Rubenstein's, **After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism**, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, and, at a more personal level, see Richard Rubenstein, **Power Struggle**, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974. An earlier version of some of this material is included in a festschrift for Richard Rubenstein, **Reflections on the Thought of Richard Rubenstein: Triage, The Holocaust and Faith**, B. R. Rubenstein and M. Berenbaum, eds., West Simsbury, Conn: Hedgehog Press, 1993, pp. 366-383. For a moving account of the tragedy of Tibet, see John Avedon, **In Exile from the Land of Snows**, New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

3. See Huston Smith, **Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition**, New York: Harper & Row, 1973, for a penetrating analysis of modernity and its impact on our perception of the religious traditions of humankind. For a moving account of the Bushman(!Kung)peoples, see Laurens van der Post, **The Lost World of the Kalihari**, London: Penguin Books edition, 1962 and his **Heart of the Hunter**, London: Penguin edition, 1961.

4. S. Radhakrishnan, **Religion and Culture**, Delhi: Vision Books, 1968, rpt.1984, p. 51.

5. S. Radhakrishnan, **Religion and Culture**, p. 51.

6. S. Radhakrishnan, **Religion and Culture**, p. 51.

7. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, 2nd ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958. The association of Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy began in the 1920s in relation to the "Frankfurt Union" and the journal **Die Kreatur** and continued into the 1960s. See Maurice Friedman, **Martin Buber's Life and Work**, 3 Vols. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981, 1983. In relation to the Frankfurt Union, see Vol.I, p. 277ff., and for **Die Kreatur** see Vol. II, p. 106ff.

8. See Lise vander Molen, **A Complete Bibliography of the Writings of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy**, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989. For an introduction to this important but little-known thinker, see M. Darrol Bryant and Hans Huessy, eds., **Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: Studies in his Life and Thought**, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986. For an interpretation of Martin Buber, mostly, and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy that attempts to place them in a tradition of dialogical philosophy, see Shmuel Hugo Bergman, **Dialogical Philosophy: From Kierkegaard to Buber**, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991. However, Bergman's reading of Rosenstock-Huessy on pages 161-170 is limited and questionable.

9. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man**, Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1938, rpt. 1969, p. 757. In this remarkable text, Rosenstock-Huessy interprets the story of "Western Man" as a single interrelated event of dialogue with destiny.

10. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 13. My gloss on Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy highlights elements of their work and gives centrality to the divine-human dialogue. It does so because I am not just seeking to present their views but to develop in concert with them a vision of the human in the Divine.

11. Martin Heidegger, **Being and Time**, p. 19.

12. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 112. His point is that we cannot make God an "object" of thought, but that does not mean that God as constituting humanity cannot be acknowledged nor enter into our grammar of the human condition.

13. Martin Buber, **Between Man and Man**, London & Glasgow: Fontana Library, 1961, chapter on "Dialogue," p. 27.

14. For two important existentialist accounts, see M. Heidegger, **Being and Time**, op.cit., and Jean Paul Sartre, **Being and Nothingness**, trans. by Hazel Barnes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

15. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **I am an Impure Thinker**, Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1970, p. 11.

16. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **I am an Impure Thinker**, p. 11. The same idea is developed in a different way in his **The Origin of Speech**, Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1981, especially under the headings of the imperative and the social process of speech, see pp. 38 ff.

17. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 115.

18. See, for example, the editor's note in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **Judaism Despite Christianity**, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, pp. 69-70.

19. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **I am an Impure Thinker**, p. 12.

20. See Heidegger, **Being and Time**, especially pp. 269-280 where he affirms that the Ruf is the call of conscience.

21. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 32

21b. The issue here is what Raimon Panikkar was later to call a "cosmotheandric vision of reality." Although we have here focused on the "theandric" dimensions with only some few references to the "cosmo" aspects, that aspect has not been far from my mind. For a fuller study of Panikkar see the PhD dissertation of L. Anthony Savari Raj, *The Cosmotheandric Vision of Raimon Panikkar: A Study*, Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Studies in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1994.

22. For a fuller exposition of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's views on this point, see my "Toward a Grammar of the Spirit in Society," in **The Many Faces of Religion and Society**, M.D. Bryant and Rita Mataragnon, eds., New York: Paragon House, 1985, pp. 173-190 and "The Grammar of the Spirit: Time, Speech, and Society," in **Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: Studies in His Life and Thought**, eds., M. D. Bryant & Hans Huessy, op. cit., pp. 233-260.

23. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **I am an Impure Thinker**, p. 10ff.

23b. Buber, **Between Man & Man**, p. 54.

24. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 3. See also Martin Buber, **A Believing Humanism: My Testament 1902-1965**, translated by Maurice Friedman, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, p. 201 where he writes, "The crisis of man which has become apparent in our day announces itself most clearly as a crisis of trust. . . . And the crisis of speech is bound up with this loss of trust. . . . Therefore, the fact that it is so difficult for present day man to pray. . . and the fact that it is so difficult for him to carry on a genuine talk with his fellow men are elements of a single set of facts. This lack of trust in Being . . . points to an innermost sickness of the sense of existence." Here Buber points to the interior connection between the relation to the Transcendent and one another. It is a point worth pondering and crucial to the argument here for the relationship of the Transcendent to humanity.

25. See Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **Speech and Reality**, Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1970, especially "In Defense of the Grammatical Method," pp. 9-44, and Martin Buber, **Between Man and Man**, especially his distinctions between community and collective, p. 144ff.

25b. Martin Buber, **Between Man and Man**, p. 37, though the language here is not what we now call "inclusive," Buber's intent was not exclusive or limited to the male gender.

26. Martin Buber, **Between Man and Man**, p. 24.

27. Richard Rubenstein, **The Age of Triage**, p. 240.

28. Martin Buber, **I and Thou**, p. 115.

29. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, **The Origin of Speech**, p. 54. Here, Rosenstock-Huessy outlines what he calls the "full cycle of speech" as it moves from the imperative (or dramatic) to the subjunctive (or lyrical) to the epical (or narrative) and ends in the logical (or classifying). As he remarks here: "the imperative, the most ancient sentence, trans-substantiates the world." This understanding of the full cycle of speech is another argument for the primacy of the Transcendent in the grammar of human life.

30. In the next lecture, I attempt to point to some of those anticipations assuming the general point made here. In other words, my expositions of the religious traditions simply assumes this crucible of the Unmanifest Transcendent that I have attempted to unfold here.