

Otto Rank as Mystic and Prophet in the Creation Spirituality Tradition

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In his chapter on “Nature and Spirit” in *Psychology and the Soul*, Rank declares himself thus: “I believe that we have entered a new phase of spiritual development, one that affects both physics and psychology.” Like so many of Rank’s brilliant observations, this short sentence carries huge messages and multiple, rich layers of meaning within it. How telling that Rank is interested in our “spiritual development” and how this evolutionary step for our species will occur in the coming together of physics and psychology. It is our “spiritual development” that provides the larger context for our “physics” and of “psychology”—and not the other way around. It is Rank’s own “belief” and conviction that history is revealing (or awaiting?) a new chapter in humanity’s evolution. Indeed, a “new phase” is being born.

Rank, writing these words in 1930, was so prescient and so profound in his grasp of the depth of history and of human nature that even today, some seventy-two years later, the new era or “phase” of which he speaks is still struggling to be born, still being unpacked. It is still *new*.

Yet, as Rank would be the first to testify, this ‘new phase’ is born of inherited stories, myths, ideologies, belief systems, fears and experiences from very long ago. The ancients and ancestors are a living part of this new turn in spiritual development. One of the prophetic contributions of Rank is his high regard for the wisdom of the ancients of whom he declares: “Primitives disclose to us the deeper sources.” If we are looking for *depth* (which I consider as good a definition of ‘spiritual’ as we can find), Rank says we ought to consider the ancients because they reveal the “deeper sources.”

Rank believes that we inherit the souls of our ancestors. We all have a premodern soul in us or remnants of the same. Rank, so deeply post-modern, admires the wisdom of the premoderns and goes hunting for it. In doing so he sets himself up against the modern mentality that saw truth only in scientific cognition and ridiculed the consciousness and mysticism of premodern peoples in order to deny it among moderns. (Theodore Roszak points out that the Enlightenment “ridiculed” mysticism as the worst offense against science and reason.) Freud ridiculed mysticism, reducing it to infantile regression and a yearning to return to the womb.

Rank respects mysticism and includes it in any view of a whole and healed personality.

In this essay I will explore Rank as Mystic; Rank as Prophet; and how Rank is a creation-centered mystic and prophet.

Rank as Mystic

I will explore six areas in which Rank emerges as a bona fide mystic.

I. Unio Mystica. Premodern and ancient peoples, like Rank, saw physics (i.e. nature and macrocosm) and psychology (human nature and microcosm) as one. All of life was a celebration of this union of psyche and cosmos. And this was a source of great wonder and admiration for Rank. After all, people still seek “an identity with the cosmic process” and this very rediscovery of cosmology will provide the surest healing for our deepest woes which stem from our separation from the cosmos. This *unio mystica*, our “*being one with the All*” and our being “*in tune with*” the cosmos, the earliest humans knew intimately. “This identification is the echo of an original identity, not merely of child and mother, but of everything living—witness the reverence of the primitive for animals. In man, identification aims at re-establishing a *lost identity with the cosmic process*, which has to be surrendered and continuously re-established in the course of self-development.” Once again Rank instructs us to look to the primitives—in this instance for the wisdom of animal relationships, indeed the “reverence” that primitives have for animals. Are we capable of recovering reverence?

Here Rank reveals a profound ecological consciousness, one that is about “all our relations” as the Lakota people pray in their most sacred ceremonies. This should come as no great surprise since, as Thomas Berry has observed, “ecology is functional cosmology.” To bring cosmology back, as Rank insists on and Berry has done in his masterful work with physicist Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story*, is to bring ecology alive. Rank is *doing* what Berry preaches sixty years after Rank: “Reinventing the human,” thus preparing us for a new, “ecozoic,” age which will be marked by new (and ancient) relationships of intimacy with nature both micro and macro.

In Rank’s view we do not toss off the souls of our ancestors, we incorporate them and fold them into our souls and therefore into the new cultural and ecological environments in which we find ourselves. This context calls on our powers of will,

our ethics and our creativity, and this makes us truly human and brings meaning to life. We are called to act and give birth.

2. Language. William James, whose work Rank studied, identifies one of the marks of mysticism as being “ineffability.” And Meister Eckhart, whom Rank also read, tells us that we “always stammer when we speak of God and divine things.” Anyone who has read Rank is familiar with his stammering and his dances with ineffability. For the mystic things are often best left unspoken. Silence rules when one is struck by awe. Yet Rank tries to speak the ineffable and to stammer about the Beyond and what he calls the “unknown.” Rank praises religion “because it admits *the Unknown*, indeed recognizes it as the chief factor instead of pretending an omniscience that we do not possess.” While acknowledging and respecting mystery or the Unknown, Rank—like other mystics—does not find it easy to talk about.

Rank is not the succinct poet that mystical writers like Eckhart or Rumi or Julian of Norwich are. Yet, in reading Rank, sometimes plodding along with his convoluted sentences and mixed images, there are moments of epiphany, breakthrough images and phrases that arrest the mind and move the heart, that speak so deeply to our depth experience that a mystical “aha” is voiced in acknowledgment of the truth he speaks on our behalf. One admires Rank for keeping at it, for not giving up the fight to take back language itself from the modern, mechanistic, age that rendered even our talking of mysticism a subversive act.

3. The Irrational. One great effort Rank makes to name the mystical is his much used term, the “irrational.” It may be better to speak in English of the “other-than-rational” or the “more-than-rational,” but I will stick with Rank’s term here. After all it is the concept born of the experience that matters most. And what is that concept for Rank? In invoking the “irrational” Rank is being the pesky prophet: He is standing up to and calling our attention to the *excessive rationality* of the modern era, of modern science, of mechanism, of reductionism, of Freud, of Newtonian causality, indeed of patriarchy itself and of the dominant culture of the West.

Why else is Rank so enamored with the “irrational” (read: “more than rational”)? Because the animals are irrational and the winds and the sea and the tigers and the stars and the planets and the rocks. Yet they all speak to us. And often of the Unknown and the mystery behind all things. As Eckhart says: “All creatures are gladly doing their best to speak of God.”

All kinds of beings—beings that an anthropocentric civilization *chooses* to ignore—live their wonderful lives with little or no rationality. Furthermore, humans too live our lives far more irrationally than modern science and modern education would have us believe. (I use that word “believe” consciously and in a Rankian fashion—the ideology of scientism is a belief system and its belief is that the rational is what counts.) In business we call rationality the “bottom line.” Rank actually believes that values count. But values are not born of rationality—nothing deep is in Rank’s view. Values are born of the “irrational.” They are born of love.

What else does Rank intend with his willfully chosen term “irrational?” He says: “The epitome of the irrational is the marvel of creation itself.” Wonder is irrational, not rational. And marveling is everything. This Jewish spiritual consciousness is echoed in Heschel when he speaks of “radical amazement” and reminds us that “awe is the beginning of wisdom.” The rational gives us knowledge but wonder gives us wisdom. Rank sought wisdom, he had seen enough of knowledge (body counts are rational-- “bottom lines” we might say for military minds). Wisdom might be defined as the bringing together of the rational (knowledge) and the irrational (awe and love). Whole civilizations fall, Rank felt, such as the Roman Empire, because they chased after the rational at the expense of the irrational. And chased after a patriarchal agenda (the masculine preference for the rational) at the expense of the feminine (for women are “carriers of the irrational.”)

To write this essay on Rank I have rented a cottage at the ocean north of Bodega Bay, California. Rank said that his work would “flourish under western skies” and himself chose the Bay area and then Lake Tahoe to write *Beyond Psychology*. I also take his words to mean that we must visit his places to arouse our souls as his was aroused. When I arrived here, standing on a cliff over the roaring ocean with undulating waves and mammoth boulders strewn by glaciers centuries ago and still being worked over day and night by the relentless sea, as I listened to the sea gulls and saw seals swimming and imagined whales diving and was blessed by a hawk swooping down over my head a Rankian thought went through my being: “The epitome of the irrational is the marvel of creation itself.”

Rank has spoken the ineffable for us. In his own poetic way he has named the unnamable for he has pointed to where we will find experience that is deep and worthy of being named “spiritual” experience. It is in nature. The wilder and freer the better.

This morning I took a walk and encountered a bull and his consort fenced in on the land. They stared at me, eye to eye we were, this bovine couple and myself, as I walked on. Is a cow rational? Is the sea rational? The sky? The wind that howled all night? The darkness that blanketed all? The fog that enveloped the distant sea this morning? The food I will eat for breakfast? The warmth I feel with the gas heater lit up? No, the rational—the making of a gas heater and the engineering that made this warm cottage possible—is good and fine *but it serves the irrational*. If it does not, if the irrational serves the rational, then ideology trumps reality and we are lost souls indeed.

Ideology derives its power precisely from the fact that it is *irrational* though it comes disguised as rational. Ideology represents the shadow side to irrationality, a wolf in sheep's clothing, it comes pretending to be scientific, objective and rational. But scratch the surface and you find what often drives it is unconscious fear, dread, guilt and the compulsion to control.

This demonstrates the power of the irrational: Repress it, forget it, deny it and it will come up in other forms to sting us with its poison. We imbue our ideologies with our distorted values—for only the irrational serves as a carrier for our values. “Vital human values”—ethics itself—derive from the irrational, from our experience of what matters, of what is truly vast and vulnerable and worthy of our attention and protection. In other words, what is truly *marvelous*. The irrational is that which “does not fit into our scheme of things”—it takes us beyond our personal, private, tribal, anthropocentric agendas into a vaster world, a cosmic place, whence we derive our truest values. This locus for ethics echoes a statement shared with me by an Aboriginal in Australia who said to me: “We derive our rules for living in the environment from our Dreamtime.” Dreamtime being of course the creation story of the Aboriginals and their on-going creation story, for creation to these ancient peoples is a dreaming and a singing into existence that never ceases. Irrational? Yes. Profoundly so.

Rank observes that life would not be life without the irrational. “Rationalistic psychology was only an outgrowth of the mentality of our age which is, or rather, was up to recently, so highly rationalized that the irrational had only the neurotic form of expression.” Repress the healthy irrational and neurosis will sting you—and sting all of a culture. But what is the cure to this excessive rationality? “To attempt to cure this result of rationalism by more rationality is just as contradictory as a war to end wars, or an effort to strengthen a weakening democracy by more democracy.”

The cure is to step out of excessive rationality and make room for the irrational which represents the power of life itself. “The only remedy is an acceptance of the fundamental irrationality of the human being and life in general, an acceptance which means not merely a recognition or even admittance of our basic ‘primitivity,’ in the sophisticated vein of our typical intellects, but a real allowance of its dynamic functioning in human behavior, which would not be lifelike without it.” What is lifelike *is* irrational and we ought to be paying attention to this first and foremost. If this means getting off our intellectual high horses and making room for its dynamic functioning in our lives so be it. (At our university we call this “art as meditation” and “ritual-making” and “body prayer,” namely getting graduate students and their professors to be irrational together. It is good for the soul as Rank insists. Indeed, it is necessary soul food. Without it we do not have education for wisdom, only education for knowledge, i.e. the rational. Without it we do not have a common ethic; instead we turn our morality over to lawyers whose excessive litigation is always rational.)

What are the negative consequences if we ignore the irrational in education and culture and our living? “When such a constructive and dynamic expression of the irrational together with the rational life is not permitted, it breaks through in violent distortions which manifest themselves individually as neurosis and culturally as various forms of revolutionary movements which succeed *because* they are irrational and not in spite of it.” Notice that Rank is not abandoning the rational—he says here that the rational and irrational life are perfectly compatible—but there must be a balance and our culture, lacking appreciation of the irrational, is far from balanced. But to its peril. For ideology will take over in its stead, *anything to bring alive the irrational*. Karl Marx succeeded so amazingly because he offered *hope* to the poor. Hope is an irrational thing. It keeps people in dire straits alive.

What else is irrational? How about the following: Dreams, music, dance, art, ritual, sex, love-making, babies, laughter, play, massage, drumming, singing, the smells of newly cut grasses, tastes of spicy foods, silence, grief, color, creativity, peace, clowning, nature, wilderness, prayer, fear, animals, angels or spirits, children, beauty, paradox, myth, stories, games, sport (that is not rational or business driven), campfires, chant, darkness, tenderness, forgiveness, meditation, God, birds, trees, plants, flowers, food. AND “legitimate foolishness,” the folly that accompanies wisdom. Holy folly.

What would life be without these? Where would we derive our values, our reasons for living, our zest for carrying on? The irrational includes the “dynamic forces governing life and human behavior.” In our culture these forces are stigmatized as “irrational.”

We need, says Rank, a whole new civilization—one that includes the irrational. For “human nature is at bottom irrational.” Rank is interested in the *ground* (Eckhart’s word) of our souls, the truth about what is at the “bottom” (Rank’s word) of our beings. And what most touches us in the depths is the “irrational.” But because society is rational (or pretends to be) we suffer from its “rational ideology” which is in fact born of an “inhibited negation of life.” The cure is to be found in this analysis: Instead of an inhibited negation of life, why not a community celebration of life? This celebration of life, this optimism, begins with awe and wonder, with marveling at creation itself.

Rank is a creation-centered mystic of the highest order. The Via Positiva, a rediscovery of the awe and wonder, the delight and joy of existence itself, is the basic cure for self and society’s tiredness and pessimism. A new falling in love with life is the medicine prescribed by Rank and other creation-centered mystics. Consider, for example, Eckhart: “Isness is God.” And Aquinas: “Joy is the human’s noblest act” and “God is supremely joyful and therefore supremely conscious.”

4. The Beyond. Another favorite concept of Rank’s is that of the “beyond.” Says Rank: “The individual is not just striving for survival but is reaching for some kind of ‘beyond.’” Beyond is something we reach for. It is not there yet. One might say it is ‘eschatological,’ or in the future. Yet it beckons us, reaches out to us. It is that which we do not yet possess; yet it is reachable. But it calls for a *reaching*, an effort to move past one’s present condition. The word “beyond” implies *being yonder*, being at a frontier, being at an edge, being on the edge, growing. Eckhart says: “God is delighted to watch our souls enlarge.” An enlarging of our souls takes us to our ‘beyond.’ Webster’s dictionary defines beyond as “a distant place usually within sight.” Being at the horizon. Adventure. Stretching. Something great to strive for, something great to welcome us in, to welcome us home. A homecoming. A return to our origins.

In *Art and Artist* Rank insists that the ancients’ passion for developing our *relationships* to the macrocosm, so fully experienced by way of ritual, can be our passion today. Humanity’s will, that is its power of choice to create, is called forth by struggle and survival issues. Our species, which is so deeply troubled by its

own mortality, seeks still to go *beyond*, to reach beyond, “to reach for some kind of beyond.” It is, in Rank’s view, that very reaching that characterizes us as a species. Call it immortality; call it going beyond death, call it cutting through denial. Call it our children; call it our monuments, our creativity, our art. Call it nationalism, call it capitalism, call it fame, call it fear. Still it beckons us, reaches to us, pulls us to some kind of beyond. We cannot escape it. We can respond to it or we can deny it. But we cannot escape it.

Rank speaks of the need to move *beyond psychology*. How is this done? “Man is born beyond the psychological era only through vital experience of his own—in religious terms, through revelation, conversions, or rebirth.” Vital experiences take us beyond, wake us up, feed us with revelation and conversion and rebirth. Vital experiences are the experiences of ecstasy and union, joy and beauty that no one can take from us. They are, reports Dr. Kubla Ross, those moments people remember on their death beds when they die peacefully. They are grace. Grace breaks through. These are mystical moments. Mysticism is our breakthrough moments of union, of ecstasy, sometimes hot or orange ecstasies, and sometimes cool or green, green/blue ecstasies. They are what nourish the soul for soul is, says Rank, our “power of rebirth.” They make us young again, new again. Eckhart says the first gift of the Spirit is *newness*.

What are some other synonyms for “beyond?” How about the following: Transcendence; infinity; spirituality; cosmos; grandeur; immensity; mysticism; God; magnanimity; creativity; surprise; Spirit; eternal life.

Rank believed that we “negotiate with the problem of the Beyond” in at least two deep instances: Art and love. There is an experience of union that overcomes separateness. As Kramer puts it, “in the jointly created—and endlessly re-created—‘moment’ of empathy between artist and enjoyer, lover and beloved, I and Thou, client and therapist, separateness is dissolved only to be rediscovered, enriched, and renewed by the dissolution of the individual into the void. ‘Love abolishes egoism,’ said Rank, ‘it merges the self in the other only to find it again enriched in one’s own ego.’” We have “beyond experiences” and invariably they are about a “dissolution of...individuality in a greater whole.” Beauty does this to us and the experience of truth and art do the same.

What is this “greater whole?” Rank dares to cite the mystics in *The Trauma of Birth* published in 1924, the book that got him expelled from Freud’s circle. Rank says the mystic “cries out in beloved ecstasy: ‘The I and the You have ceased to exist between us, I am not I, You are not You, also You are not I; I am at the same

time I and You, You are at the same time You and I'." Rank saw separation from the cosmos as the greatest issue besetting our species. This cosmic separation is temporarily healed by our experiences of mystical union, the return to an original identity of union with the cosmic process which "has to be surrendered and continuously re-established in the course of self-development." When we surrender ourselves in art or in love we are undergoing a "potential restoration of a union with the Cosmos, which once existed and was then lost. The individual psychological root of this sense of unity I discovered (at the time of writing *The Trauma of Birth*, 1924) in the prenatal condition which the individual in his yearning for immortality strives to restore. Already, in that earliest stage of individualization, the child is not only factually one with the mother but beyond that, one with the world, with a Cosmos floating in mystic vapors in which present, past, and future are dissolved."

This passage echoes Eckhart when he talks about our pre-origins in the Godhead where the unity is so great that no one will have missed us when we return. We return at death but before that in encountering our "unborn self" in meditation and in other unitive experiences.

For Rank, because he is at home *in the cosmos*, the world "bears the mark of infinity." (Gaston Bachelard) Rank's world is not a rational world that humans make but the *whole world* that constitutes the very meaning of the Greek word "cosmos." French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in his moving book, *The Poetics of Space*, describes what living in a cosmos is like. There the soul experiences *immensity* and *grandeur*. We are at home with solitude for great things well up in the soul because of solitude. "Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts up again when we are alone....we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense." Our soul is a *vast* place full of hidden grandeur and in our experiences of unity or grace "we discover that immensity in the intimate domain is intensity, an intensity of being, the intensity of a being evolving in a vast perspective of intimate immensity." Intensity, Immensity, Intimacy—in the human they all occur at once. There follows a new level of self-appreciation and gratitude for being here. "Slowly, immensity becomes a primal value, a primal, intimate value. When the dreamer really experiences the word immense, he sees himself liberated from his cares and thoughts, even from his dreams. He is no longer shut up in his weight, the prisoner of his own being." The feeling of ecstasy results in a taste of profound *voluptuousness*. (Eckhart says "God is voluptuous and delicious.") Liberation and healing follow. I believe Rank saw all this. This is why he champions so fiercely the reunion of microcosm and macrocosm.

5.The Now. Rank praises the experience of union with the cosmos as being one of the suspension of time—“present, past and future are dissolved” at that moment. He further elaborates on the “Now” experience in his essay on “Nature and Spirit.” Indeed, these observations constitute the very last page of his book, *Psychology and the Soul*, forming a kind of culminating crescendo to his study of the soul and its history. “In the psychic realm, the only reality is the *Now*. (italics his), the same Now that physicists find so incomprehensible, useless, and even unthinkable.” Rank criticizes Freud for dwelling in the past for “in so doing, he neglects the truly psychic element—the present, active self, and its corresponding Now.” Thus for Rank the creative process, the choice to give birth that is the basis of all ethics, happens *only in the now*. Creativity is not of the past; therefore our healing will not come from knowledge of the past but from current choices, choices made by the “present, active self, and its corresponding Now.” Rank applies his philosophy of the Now and practices what he preaches (or is he preaching what he practices?) when he tells us that his “dynamic therapy” is based first and foremost on an emphasis that shifts “from the past to the *present*, in which *all* emotional experience takes place.” The Eternal Now is reenacted in the healing paradigm Rank presents. The emphasis on the Now is not speculative; it dictates a trust of what is really going on. This sounds very zen-like.

Meister Eckhart talks similarly when he says that God is creating everything of the past and everything of the present and everything of the future in the depths of your soul now. Eckhart develops the Now consciousness when he writes: “God is in this power as in the eternal now. Were the spirit at every moment united with God in this power, people could never grow old...There everything is present and new, everything which is there. And there you have in a present vision everything which ever happened or ever will happen...everything is present and in this ever-present vision I possess everything.”

Another creation mystic, the historical Jesus, also speaks of the importance of the Now when he says: “The kingdom and queendom of God *is* among you.” It is from these experiences of the eternal now that our memories are stamped forever with what we truly cherish. Therefore it is from these glimpses of a restoration of a primal unity (Eckhart talks about our return to our “unborn self”) that our truest values emerge. Without honoring these Now experiences, we do not share values in common. We have no shared ethic.

6.Letting Go. Like the mystics of old such as Eckhart, who says “we sink

eternally from letting go to letting go into the One,” Rank talks about the constant separations that life asks of us. “I have learned that the capacity to separate is one of life’s major functions. Life in itself is a mere succession of separations, beginning with birth, going on through several weaning periods and the development of the individual personality, and finally culminating in death—which represents the final separation. At birth, the individual experiences the first shock of separation, which throughout his life he strives to overcome. In the process of adaptation, man persistently separates from his old self, or at least from those segments of his old self that are now outlived. Like a child who has outgrown a toy, he discards the old parts of himself of which he has no further use.”

If we fail to learn to let go, the result is neurosis. The neurotic “is unable to accomplish this normal detachment process. He cannot live through and emancipate himself from the various fundamental separation stages in life. Owing to fear or guilt generated in the assertion of his own autonomy, he is unable to free himself, and instead remains suspended upon some primitive level of his evolution. He stays fixated, so to speak, upon a particular worn-out part of his past that he cannot sever himself, and his whole present behavior is directed and symbolized in terms of this *unaccomplished* separation.” Thus the neurotic never tastes the Now. He is too busy living in the past and bracing himself for an imagined angst-ridden future. *The neurotic is not just the artiste manque; he is also the mystique manque.* Rank is not only a mystic himself—he calls us all to the *unio mystica* and to the “marvel of creation,” to the irrational and the beyond, and to the Now and to deep and constant letting go. To fail to respond is to invite loss of soul.

Mysticism is our “Yes” to life. Rank proposes that neurosis is by definition a refusal to say Yes; thus it is a refusal to be a mystic: “*All neurotic reactions can be thus reduced to one Big No that men hurl at life.*”

Rank as Prophet

If mysticism is our “Yes” to life, prophecy is our “No” to life’s imposters. Rabbi Heschel defines the primary work of the prophet as “interference.” Rank is constantly interfering, constantly being prophet. He interferes with psychology and interferes with the modern era’s biases against mysticism and against indigenous wisdom and against spirituality itself. Indeed, Rank combines his mysticism with his prophecy in the very title of his last work, *Beyond Psychology*. For prophecy—interference—and mysticism—experience of transcendence or the “beyond”—both take us *beyond psychology*.

Rank, always the prophet, also translates “beyond” into critical thinking about culture. Not only must we move “beyond psychology” but beyond rationality as we saw above. And beyond patriarchy or masculine ideology--women he warns us should find their own psychology and not borrow Freud’s which is man’s “last attempt to control nature this time his own.” This in his essay on “Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology”. He calls us beyond anthropocentrism by his love of cosmos and the macrocosm and by his call for “reverence” for animals and he calls us beyond the *hubris* of the modern era, the arrogance toward indigenous peoples. He calls artists to move beyond the “art mania” of a culture that ignores the true roots of beauty and creativity. He calls us beyond boredom, back to wonder, beyond adultism, back to healthy child-likeness. He practices what he preaches when he signs his letters as “Huck” as in Huck Finn whose childhood he believes is worth all of us remembering. He calls us beyond neurosis, beyond the *artiste manque* as he calls us to our authentic will, i.e. choice to create. The prophet, says American philosopher William Hocking, is “the mystic in action.” We have seen Rank as mystic, as champion of the *Unio Mystica*, of Speaking the Unspeakable, of the Irrational, of the Beyond, of the Now, of Letting Go. Rank is also a mystic in action, a prophet who chose time and again to “interfere.”

Being a mystic in a rationalistic culture that dreads the mystic is itself *interfering with that culture*. Therefore we have already seen Rank in his role as prophet insofar as we saw him championing mysticism and as we saw him moving beyond anthropocentrism to ecological awareness, “all our relations.” We listed many of the “beyonds” that he was committed to either explicitly or implicitly. We know the story of the price he paid for his commitment to a bigger view of the world and of the psyche than Freud and his followers were willing to admit. He had to go “beyond Freud,”—a term he used himself--beyond his mentor and friend and father-figure and this was never easy for him. Indeed, it cost him his marriage as his wife stayed in the Freudian camp. Rank’s story parallels that of other prophets: He was not honored in his own village. Indeed, he was vilified. But he did not respond in kind. He never attacked Freud personally nor his followers, even though they attacked him. Nor did his anger and hurt get projected onto his enemies. Nor did it fester within him causing blame and bitterness. There was no bitterness in Rank and this testifies to his greatness of soul. Indeed, his call to let go of the hero and become one’s own was a call he himself heeded. (The theological word for “hero” is “saint.”) I believe Rank was a holy man as well as a spiritual genius because he stayed free of bitterness and found non-violent ways to deal with his anger.)

Rank, though not a practicing Jew, was always faithful to the heart of Jewish spirituality and that is, in my opinion, the marriage of mysticism (our Yes to life in spite of all its obstacles) and prophecy (our interference or “No” to injustice and falsity that prevents life from unfolding). The two impulses blend beautifully in Rank’s work. Consider, for example, how he is calling for a love of life when he insists that the fear of death is preventing us from living fully. Or when he names the neurotic impulse as using our creativity falsely employed to escape life and when he dares challenge the artist to put more effort into living an artful life and renounce ‘objets d’art’ if needs be to accomplish this. Or when he, in line with the Biblical teaching that we are all made in the image and likeness of the creator, says we are all co-creators and must get on with our task. Or when he reminds us that Marx’s success was in appealing to the irrational or hope among the world’s poor. The fact that the first chapter of his final book is on “Psychology and Social Change” and the seventh chapter calls women to create their own psychology and move beyond patriarchal ideologies are proof positive of his commitment to interfere. His courage is as real as his analytical depth and breadth. So too is the fact that the social workers in America, people who work daily with the poor and neglected of society, responded so warmly and deeply to Rank’s message. The Schools of Social Work in Philadelphia and in New York welcomed him to their cause.

Rank’s prophetic courage and insight is further evidenced in his willingness to take on psychology as it was practiced up to his time, that is to say in the person of his mentor and friend Freud. To bring this about he himself invokes on more than one occasion the likeness of himself to Einstein. He seeks an Einsteinian revolution in psychology, one that moves from so-called “objectivity” a la Newton to one of *relationship* and relativity a la Einstein. This conscious effort to move from modern science to a postmodern one on Rank’s part is clearly a work of interference.

Rank does not mince words about the strength demanded in the task of interfering. “In *The Trauma of Birth* (1924), extending Freudian determinism from object to subject—from patient to therapist, psychoanalytically, speaking—I jolted Freud’s ‘physical’ standpoint by analyzing the *relationship* (his italics) between research subject and observer in the analytic situation itself. This relativistic orientation led in my more recent publications to a relativity-based psychology in which there is no longer a fixed position for the observer—that is, consciousness—but only the moment-to-moment dynamic relation of the twosome.” He extends this Einsteinian stretch to the very definition of psychology on his final page of *Psychology and the*

Soul when he declares: “Psychology has less to do with facts than does physics...[Psychology] is a science of relationships—a way of observing relationship and relativities.....It is in essence a science of relations...” Instead of isolating the individual to yield certain “scientific results,” we ought to acknowledge that “*all living psychology is relationship psychology*” whether the relationship be between two persons or between multiple persons as in the family or larger social groups. Here Rank is naming the very essence of a feminist philosophy and applying it to his profession: That essence being *relationship*. Rank is to be commended for his daring to apply critical judgment and interference *to his own profession and his own livelihood*. Many are the intellectuals who critique every system but their own, every structure but the one that is feeding them. Rank dared to critique his very livelihood and in the process paid the price of a prophet without succumbing to regret or guilt.

To speak cosmology in a modern world is prophetic for it stands up to anthropocentrism. Rank’s insistence on micro/macrocosm consciousness is deeply prophetic therefore.

In a lecture delivered in 1938 at the University of Minnesota, Rank repeats his call for a feminine psychology and he adds the issue of children’s neglect as well. “We do not possess a real psychology of the *woman* nor do we understand the *child* psychologically.” What we have in psychology “is in essence *man-made*: that is to say, man has projected his own psychology into the woman and into the child.” How ahead of his time Rank was in pointing to what we can call today Adulthood—the projection of adult attitudes into children. How far this has taken us can be observed as we learn that Macdonald Corporation for example addresses its advertising promotions to three year olds!³⁰ And then the dominant culture wonders why obesity is stalking our children.

Instead, Rank suggests that adults ought to learn from the children (Jesus offered the same subversive advice). The child is more mystical, more at home with the irrational. “The child lives mentally and emotionally on an entirely different plane: his world is not a world of logic, causality, and rationalism. *It is a world of magic*, a world in which imagination and creative will reign—*internal* forces that cannot be explained in terms of scientific psychology.” To honor the child’s wisdom is to recover a respect for nature itself. “The child lives in a world of magic, where no logical or rational—that is, man-made—laws govern, but where the irrationality of nature herself, of which the woman is still so much a part, predominates.” Instead of projection of adult ideologies into children, Rank proposes a radical alternative: The way of love, of a love that is more than sentimental and anthropocentric. We

cannot remove the child's fear or insecurity, but we can "alleviate [them] by love, *a love that connects the tragically separated individual again with cosmic life*" (italics his). Of course, for this to happen, adults must themselves possess a relationship to the cosmos. Rank continues: "Instead of psychologizing the child, we should respect his irrational nature and learn from him to accept it humbly in ourselves as well. We are not in the least more secure than he is, we are not less irrational at bottom. All we do is pretend to be; that's our tragedy, our false heroism."

Rank and the Creation Spirituality Tradition

The creation spirituality tradition is found among indigenous peoples the worldover and is the oldest tradition in the Bible tracing its roots there to the J Source in the Hebrew Bible as well as to the prophets and to Wisdom literature. It is the tradition of the historical Jesus who not only knew wisdom literature but also grew up in the richest land of Israel, Galilee, and found there the food for his parables all of which invoke creation's beauty and relationships (seeds and bushes, fishes and sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, birds nesting and falling from their nest, the beauty of lilies in the field and more). The creation spiritual tradition looks on the spiritual journey as happening in four paths, paths that intersect and repeat themselves in ever advancing spirals of fullness and consciousness. (These four paths are in conscious distinction from the three paths of Purgation, Illumination and Union that were invoked by patriarchal Christianity that dominated religious language for 1700 years. These three paths conveniently exclude the role of justice, the experience of joy and pleasure, and creativity.) The four paths of the creation spiritual journey are named as follows:

Via Positiva: The experience of joy, delight, wonder at creation in its fullness. Clearly Rank is at home with this experience, the "marvel at creation itself." But we ought not to underestimate the effort it takes in the midst of culture's many betrayals. In fact, in Rank's view, the "new hero" will be one committed to the via positiva: "The new hero, still unknown, is the one who can live and love in spite of our *mal du siecle*."

Via Negativa: The experience of darkness, nothingness, suffering but also silence. The proper response is letting be and letting go. Suffering becomes our teacher. As does silence. Rank speaks of the via negativa by trusting the one suffering (the client in therapy) to undergo his or her pain and to be with it. He also countenances, as we have seen, the principle of continuous separations or letting go's. And he insists that all difference need not be negatively conceived.

The Via Negativa is, among other things, about accepting difference. The neurotic refuses to let go, “he is unable to accept this—*his difference*—positively. He is compelled by a deep-rooted self-denial to interpret his difference negatively, as inferiority.” The via negativa includes letting go of denial and self-hatred and fear of being different.

Via Creativa. From the filling of Path One and the Emptying of Path Two there is born “breakthrough” (Eckhart’s word) or what Rank would call Rebirth and connecting to our primal will which is our capacity for creativity. “The individual is both creator and creature,” declares Rank, but for the neurotic “the creative expression of will is a negative one, resting on the denial of the creator role.”

But creativity is a choice, as all morality is. We face life and death every day and we are free to choose on a daily basis. “I put before you life and death—choose life” says the Scriptures. (Deuteronomy 30.19) So also says Rank who declares: “Do not be reluctant to give birth.” Creativity becomes the linchpin to Rank’s therapeutic method offering the patient “a much more *active* role than being merely an object upon whom the therapist operates, like a surgeon. Thus, my concept allows for operation of the patient’s own will as the most constructive force in the therapeutic process.” And by will we all know Rank means the choice to give birth. I have written in greater depth about Rank’s contribution to a spirituality of art in “Rank and the Spiritual Journey” and *Creativity* but let me cite just one confession by Rank on this subject, a subject so dear to him that it came up in his very first book, *The Artist*. “What I called the artist in that book was something other than the man who actually paints. I meant by *artist* the creative personality....I emphasized not the biological and eternal factors but this *inner* self of the individual, whatever you want to call it: something in the individual himself that is creative, that is impelling, that is not taken in from without but grows somehow within.” Compare Eckhart: “The truth does not come from outside in but from inside out and passes through an inner form.”

Via Transformativa. The proper use of our creativity and all our delight, suffering, silence and solitude is to channel those energies into compassion and justice-making, into healing and celebration. That is the prophetic work par excellence: Rank interferes with sadness and degradation, with abuse and soul-loss through what he called “empathy” and “identification” in the therapeutic process. “Correct understanding is one of empathy based on identification, whereas intellectual understanding is again projection to a certain degree, a *compelling of the other* to our own thought, our own interpretation.” Surely empathy and

identification are forms of compassion. Rank practiced this and spoke of it: “Love abolishes egoism, it merges the self in the other to find it again enriched in one’s own ego.” All psychologists—and indeed all workers—felt the original call to this noble vocation of compassion. The trick is to get it back.

Thus we see that for many reasons Rank stands out as a mystic and prophet in the creation-centered tradition, a genius in spirituality as much as in psychology.

Conclusion

Rank observed that “new personality types are created during social and spiritual crises of religious, political or economic origin.” I believe Rank was such a type. While writing of Rank’s spiritual genius at California’s coast, I am witness to the blue sky reflecting the deep blue ocean on this stunning and sunny August afternoon. I adopt his words that his work “will flourish under Western skies” to mean that at our quite new University of Creation Spirituality located in Oakland, California under “western skies,” his work is indeed flourishing as we commit ourselves to teaching lessons of mysticism and the new cosmology by incorporating the beyond and the irrational through a pedagogy that includes creativity, ritual, body prayer and art as meditation, as well as intellectual study—all for the purpose of building up prophets. Especially prophets willing to stand up in their own professions and speak out, interfere, heal and infiltrate. Like Rank did. Rank’s teaching and his example will inspire us always.

