

THEO 143 Religion and Culture, April 7, 1943
Becker, chapter 8

4. *Religious Self-transcendence*. Christianity took the thing men most wanted to deny – creature consciousness – and made it the very *condition for* his cosmic heroism.

But Christianity is in disrepute since the Enlightenment in sophisticated circles, and several other alternatives have appeared. Without God, what does one do to merge himself with some higher meaning?

The *romantic solution*: fix your urge to cosmic heroism onto *another person* in the form of a *love object*. Find what you need in your love partner. The ‘cosmology of two.’ In romanticism, the lover absorbs into himself or herself the whole dimension of the divine. Become morally dependent on another. 161f.: ‘Modern man’s dependency on the love partner, then, is a result of the loss of spiritual ideologies, just as is his dependency on his parents or on his psychotherapist. He needs *somebody*, some ‘individual ideology of justification’ to replace the declining ‘collective ideologies’ ... If you don’t have a God in heaven, an invisible dimension that justifies the visible one, then you take what is nearest at hand and work out your problems on that.’

But sex is, says Rank, a ‘disappointing answer to life’s riddle.’ The sexual partner does not and cannot represent a complete and lasting solution to the human dilemma. For one thing, one becomes *bound* to the object in dependency. One needs it for self-justification. It is too narrow a fetishization of meaning, and one comes to resent it. 166: ‘If you find the ideal love and try to make it the sole judge of good and bad in yourself, the measure of your strivings, you become simply the reflex of another person. You lose yourself in the other, just as obedient children lose themselves in the family. No wonder that dependency whether of the god or the slave in the relationship, carries with it so much underlying resentment ... When you confuse personal love and cosmic heroism you are bound to fail in both spheres. The impossibility of the heroism undermines the love, even if it is real. As Rank so aptly says, this double failure is what produces the sense of utter despair that we see in modern man. It is impossible to get blood from a stone, to get spirituality from a physical being.’

No human being can be a god-like ‘everything’ to another, and no human relationship can bear the burden of godhood. When you realize this, you attack loved ones, try to bring them down to size, hack away at them in order to save yourself and redeem the unreal over-investment. Or you deflate *yourself* in order to keep the relationship, and you end up in *depression*.

You want redemption, a sense of justification, from the partner, a validation of your own existence. You want to be made good through the partner’s love. *And*

the partner can't do it. He too is doomed to die. 167: 'Redemption can only come from outside the individual, from beyond, from our conceptualization of the ultimate source of things, the perfection of creation. It can only come, as Rank saw, when we lay down our individuality, give it up, admit our creatureliness and helplessness.' 169: 'Man cannot fashion an absolute from within his condition. Cosmic heroism must transcend human relationships. People need a beyond, but they reach for the nearest one. This limits and enslaves them.

169f.: 'You can look at the whole problem of a human life in this way. You can ask the question: What kind of beyond does this person try to expand in; and how much individuation does he achieve in it?'

We become individuated only by being separated out of personal 'beyonds.' This is what the artist, the *creative type* does. He is separated out of the common pool of shared meanings. He fashions *his own* answer to the problem of existence, earns his own immortality as a result of his own unique gifts.

But how can one justify his own heroism? Even as a creator, he is a creature overwhelmed by the creative process. His work, too, is finite, ambiguous. There is no way for the artist to be at peace with his work or with the society that accepts it. The artist's gift is always to creation itself, to the ultimate meaning of life, to God. 173: 'The only way out of human conflict is full renunciation, to give one's life as a gift to the highest powers. Absolution has to come from the absolute beyond ... To renounce the world and oneself, to lay the meaning of it to the powers of creation, is the hardest thing for man to achieve ... How to develop a creative work with the full force of one's passion, a work that saves one's soul, and at the same time to renounce that very work because it cannot by itself give salvation. In the creative genius we see the need to combine the most intensive Eros of self-expression with the most complete Agape of self-surrender. It is almost too much to ask.' Almost, but not quite!

174f. – conclusion.