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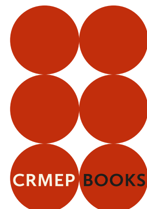

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Solidarity: necessary fiction or metaphysical given?

In her essay on Franz Rosenzweig in *Judaism and Modernity*, Gillian Rose sums up the great Jewish philosopher's fundamental social theory in these terms:

> In *The Star of Redemption, the self* is *contra the soul*: the self is for itself, bounded, enclosed and solitary, it lacks any bridge to other selves, while the soul receives and gives boundless love. 'No community can originate' from selves, even though the defiance of the self is the potential beginning of soul.[1]

But Rose immediately challenges this, in very characteristic mode:

> However, only if the Other's being-for-self – the other's relation to their own boundary – becomes my being-for-self can there be a middle. Redemption would mean not that the Other, the neighbour, is covered by love, is beloved, but that the bounded singularity of both one and the other fail towards the recognition of that sinful self-relation which denies the self-relation of the other in relation to self.[2]

In other words, Rosenzweig is, in Rose's view, being seduced by a covertly Christian agenda in which the 'middle', the world of political actuality, clashing claims and agendas, disputes over right and lawfulness, is submerged in the immediacy of *caritas* (charity or love) so that the specific task of finding a 'way through the world' is fatally obscured. The imperative to understand how power operates is ignored or trivialized. The notion of living in a 'middle' entails boundaries between subjects; and, says Rose, it is in relation to those boundaries as a third element in addition to the selves involved that a 'world' emerges in which it is possible to identify truthfully the way in which the erosion of boundaries plays in the interest of a 'reactive will to power', which we skilfully conceal under the guise of love, but which is in effect 'the degradation of the self-relation of the other'. Put in slightly different terms, this is about the seduction of a model of human relation beyond mediation: immediacy, the simple transparency of soul to soul, is a tempting prospect, but nearly all the essays in *Judaism and Modernity* are, in one way or another, a warning against this seduction. Mediation, or 'mediacy' if you prefer, is the condition of historical, linguistic humanity struggling constantly to resist the pressure to assimilate the other, the pressure to deny boundaries. Recognizing the boundary is what pushes me back to define my selfhood in negotiation with what it is radically *not*. I learn to be my 'self' in this reflexive and recursive engagement with other processes of reflexive and recursive engagement, not by some

metaphysical stipulation of identity, nor by an introspection that dissolves my always-already related position as speaker and thinker and 'political' agent.

SOLIDARITY AND MEDIATION

My aim in this exploration of Rose's thought is to investigate what implications this critique of 'immediacy' has for what can be said about *solidarity* as a principle in social ethics. At first sight, most language about solidarity sounds as though it is celebrating the denial of boundaries, the ideal transparency of my desire and need to yours and vice versa; it is about the full appropriation of human kinship – and ultimately, we might say, with Rose's strictures in mind, about a communal social life beyond history. Rose's critique of immediacy rests on the recognition that the ideal of mutual transparency conceals an aspiration to assimilation: what I say to the other is, in effect, 'what you want and understand is not different from what I want and understand', so that the other's investment in their own self-relation (self-representation, self-awareness, self-positioning) is not allowed to remain *difficult* for me. Rose's discussion of Simone Weil and Emmanuel Levinas digs deeper into the issue of difficulty as crucial to a truthful political philosophy, observing that both the thinkers she engages with there (thinkers who are in various ways deeply at odds with each other, as she spells out) rest their ethical vision on the idea of a commandment which 'is never mediated and cannot be learnt, that is, it

is not law, for any conceivable flexibility of knowledge and experience can only pertain to possession.'[3] And possession is what both Weil and Levinas oppose to the self-abnegating identification with the other, the willingness to 'substitute' for the other, which is the essence of moral action. Rose can be read as putting down a marker against one of the things most obviously associated with some versions of solidarity, the ideal of putting oneself in the other's place. If such an identification with the other is really possible, then the boundaries that constitute a 'middle', a world extending in time and difference and negotiation, are relative affairs which the ideally virtuous person can overcome. But if that is indeed the case, if there is no imperative to *learn* what it is for the other to occupy their own place – a learning that is always incomplete because my capacity is defined by the place I occupy – then what appears originally as redeeming communion becomes something less redemptive. Rose evokes a trackless waste, a landscape without frontiers or paths to follow, where any and every location is 'equally beginning and ending'.[4] Without imagined trajectories of movement and friction with the unknown, we are left drastically vulnerable to any and every bid for dominance. Not only justice but any kind of love that is more than self-consoling sentiment requires another kind of map – not a dissolution of boundaries but a continuing reimagining of them, in critical consciousness of our opacity to one another, and so too of the ease with which we revert to what Rose so bluntly calls 'sinful self-relation'.

How far, then, does the language of solidarity, in both its political and modern theological contexts, lay itself open to these criticisms? And – from another perspective – how far does Rose's focus on critical self-relation give grounds for the criticism that her later work is moving inexorably away from the material actualities of politics, and specifically leaving behind the problematic of reading and reworking the legacy of Marx?[5]

The history of the term 'solidarity' in its political context is a substantial topic in itself, but a reasonable summary might be that it has its roots in the recognition that diverse individuals and groups have a fundamental *shared interest*, such that a policy or decision affecting one is understood to affect all. On this basis, it becomes imperative to devise action and strategies together that look to cooperative measures to secure what is threatened in this shared interest, and to resist all pressures, internal or external, to isolate one group from another. This is the basic vision of solidarity within European labour movements from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In its origins it is primarily and urgently to do with *class* solidarity, and so with the conditions of labour and the common vulnerability of workers under capitalism; a rationale for unionized activism and shared strike action. But the struggle of the Polish trades union movement in the 1980s which famously took the name 'Solidarity' (*Solidarność*) illustrates how the concept could be deployed not only in the context of mass protest by the workforce and the demand for participatory

working arrangements in industry but also in the name of a more broadly conceived free self-organization in civil society over against authoritarian government.[6]

That Polish movement was itself stimulated in significant part by the use of the term in Catholic social thinking during the mid- to late twentieth century. It is not clear exactly when the rhetoric of solidarity was first recognized as an intrinsic element of this theoretical perspective, but it emerges frequently from the 1950s onwards and is strongly in focus in the 1987 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. There the Pope insists that solidarity is more than a *feeling* of compassion and identifies 'fairness, truth, justice and solidarity' as central conditions for lasting social peace.[7] Similarly, in 1999, another papal document[8] devotes a significant section to how solidarity should be advanced and underlines the formula of 'dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity' as the elements of a just society. In an address in 2008 Pope Benedict XVI defined solidarity as what allows the entire human family to share equally in both spiritual and material goods, and also noted that solidarity became a reality when one person was ready to sacrifice their well-being or life for another.[9] It is clear that the Catholic version of the solidarity ideal is deeply bound up not only with the recognition of shared interest but also with appropriate actions and policies to secure this shared interest; it is emphatically a 'virtue', not simply some kind of empathic sensation, a mere feeling of 'distress' at suffering in the words of John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical.[10] It is, on

the one hand, a relationship that is 'given' – an aspect of the 'communion' shared by believers and in some sense by the whole human family.[11] It is not, in other words, something that depends on how generous or empathetic we happen to be feeling. On the other hand, it is to do with appropriate action that challenges whatever distorts or obscures this given reality. To quote another theological discussion, the Anglican writer Ken Leech refers to an older study by V.A. Demant to the effect that solidarity is not 'a question of creating union out of the materials of discord, but rather of combating those forces that disrupt solidarity through a return to the source of solidarity, that is, to God'.[12]

POLITICS AND CRITICAL SELF-RELATION

It is precisely this emphasis on the 'givenness' of solidarity that might ring some alarm bells for a reader of Rose. Indeed, Ken Leech in the book just quoted has some stringent things to say about premature certainties in identifying 'common good' or 'shared good' in an unhistorical fashion that ignores the actual material conflicts of class, race, gender and so on.[13] When discourse about 'common good' appears, it is always worth asking who is assuming the right to define it. This would be a pre-critical and non-historical account of social cohesion. We would be thinking of a good that did not have to be *learned*. And a good that does not have to be learned is one that can represent human justice only as the possession of identical goods by abstractly equal subjects, subjects with no history, and (bearing in mind the origins of solidarity

language in nineteenth-century socialism) no class identity, no stake in the contested world of control of production. Thus the language of the papal documents on solidarity as the virtue that enables goods to be shared needs some interrogation and refinement if it is not to be distorted or weakened by the assumption that those goods are 'out there', pre-existing (so to speak) the actual interactions of social subjects. This is to conflate 'common good' with the common possession of fixed commodities.

Josh Davis argues, in his very complex and careful reading of Rose, that she comes close to saying – but doesn't quite say – that, if '[m]isrecognition is the social effect of commodification on consciousness', then the 'broken middle' understood as the locus of the misrecognizing consciousness is precisely what allows us *to see the process by which this consciousness is produced*. And when we see that misrecognition is *produced*, that it has a contingent history of coming-to-be, we can also see that it is capable of being challenged. As Davis notes, Rose's prescriptions for such challenge are tantalizingly inchoate, but it is not accurate to read her as simply abandoning any possibility of embodied social critique or resistance.[14] In an earlier reflection on Rose's late work, I proposed that she sees the foundational element of the Hegelian intellectual legacy as the definition of 'reason' in terms of the question 'Must this be?'[15] Contrary to Davis's interpretation, I was not suggesting this simply as a vaguely 'transcendental' question but as one specifically grounded in the capacity

of thought to resist the supposed naturalness of violence (using that word loosely to designate any historical complex of coercion and possession); and to do so in the name of whatever it is that makes an 'immanent future' both thinkable and (therefore) possible. And, incidentally, that this in the long run requires a theological turn of some kind seems to me as clear as it does to Davis.

The salient point is the way in which Rose's critical agenda complicates ideas of solidarity as (a) simply arising from a perception of the other's need or desire as transparent to me and immediately congruent with my own and (b) oriented towards a 'common good' that may be covertly defined by one interest against others, depending on the distribution of both rhetorical and specifically coercive power (economic and political) in a social setting. If human thinking is always to do with the ways we interrogate our own confidence in or aspiration to 'immediacy', it will always be unsettling its own account of human universality – not in the name of localized or identitarian positions that disregard the question of 'universal' conditions for human flourishing, but so as to avoid the pull towards an account of common human good that is inadequate (and therefore 'violent') because it is inflected by a pre-critical account of the self's positioning. Identitarian narratives are only another variant of the hunger for immediacy, and all the more dangerous because they purposefully ignore the possibility of interrogating the 'local' and thus, in effect, silence

the 'Must this be?' question of reason.[16] 'Universalism' is always re-forming itself as the commitment to question existing statements of its own inclusivity; but of course this happens because of the encounter with the excluded voice in the context of actual relations of power and control, and it operates not by a straightforward appeal to the conventional contemporary values of inclusivity or diversity but by exposing the possibility of learning how one's own privilege has come to be what it is. To take a very obvious and current example, combating racism is not just a matter of insisting on the goods of diversity and tolerance and the evils of discrimination; it entails a new critical perspective on the sources of racial disadvantage and exclusion and a questioning of how their legacy continues to operate, even when there is a verbal and theoretical acceptance of racial equality. Andrew Brower Latz has discussed the convergence between aspects of Rose's work and the writings of Axel Honneth on 'recognition' as a principle in political ethics, but observes that 'recognition is not simply registering a fact but involves a change in the individual'.[17] In Rose's own terminology, my 'investment' in myself is altered in the achieving of recognition – which means an alteration in the model of the possessive and self-defining ego which sustains both the distorted consciousness of unequal society and the distorted practices of acquisition and possession that continue to act as a malign 'feedback loop' to reinforce the distortion.

THE SOLIDARITY OF SPEAKERS

We might take the argument briefly in a direction that is not quite Rose's own but has some resonance with it. In plain terms, what makes possible the critical interrogation of our 'self-investment' or 'self-relation' is *language*.[18] The conscious subject is most obviously confronted with boundaries when it is engaged in symbolic exchanges which it does not control – in 'conversation' in the very broadest sense. Even a minimal understanding of the other in this context requires some scrutiny of my own symbolic practice, my own policies in the process of semiotic exchange. I cannot wholly stipulate what is to count as 'meaning', even if I can manipulate or coerce other speakers in varying degrees to steer their meanings into a unilateral convergence with mine. But even if in linguistic exchange I succeed in silencing or (borrowing Rose's language) 'degrading' the meaning of the other, I cannot survive simply by speaking to myself. Awareness of a symbolic/semiotic exchange in which learning and change occur highlights the role of acknowledged difficulty, sustained attention, capacity to bracket a sheer unexamined self-interest and so on. It also highlights the reality of parallel but by definition not identical processes unfolding in the self-representation of (at least) two speakers. Once again, even in the most minimal way, the desire of two or more agents is exposed to modification in the enterprise of 'making sense'. A world is constructed cooperatively. But this is not to take refuge prematurely in an idealizing

of linguistic relation, since language encodes power, inequality, oppressive norms, violence. The shared world that language generates remains a site of contest, read and experienced differently by different speakers. And so one of the tasks of a political ethic – not to mention a theological politics – is the interrogation of semiotic exchange in order to bring to light the failures in exposing one's own self-relatedness to the other's, and the reality of 'degraded' versions of the other's self-relation. 'Decolonizing' language – that bugbear of certain voices on the cultural Right – is simply the task of allowing language to *work*: that is, to continue to reshape itself as the fabric of dispossession, not exclusively in any mystical sense but just as the process of repeatedly uncovering what in the reality of exchange is not controlled by either/any participant.

This suggests a different approach to solidarity. What if we were to rethink solidarity in terms of the *solidarity of speakers*? The recognition I accord to the subject involved with me in semiotic or symbolic interaction (perhaps we should be wary of using the word 'exchange' here too freely) is not the arms'-length acknowledgement that the other is in possession of certain qualities or qualifications that render them deserving of attention. They are already what they are in virtue of a symbolic relation with the environment we share. They are (simply as embodied agents) makers of meaning: 'finding a way through the world', in Rose's phrase. What I attend to in speaking with them is both their unfolding self-relation and their habitual

‘symbolizing’ of the environment, their own *mediated* practice in finding that way. Josh Davis, in the theological coda to his essay on Rose, notes that the religious sensibility does not begin from any recognition that is based on the creation of value by *labour*. In the Christian context, ‘grace is not produced by labour of any kind. It is an actuality, a justice, that God establishes for the world’ in the events around the trial, execution and resurrection of Jesus.[19] Other religious discourses have comparable (not identical) ways of affirming that the refusal of commodification must be embodied in a social practice that understands human value as something that is not dependent on the success of human productive action.[20]

‘Justice’ in this context means the appropriate or truthful ascription of worth, dignity, or whatever you might call it, to the other in virtue of their always-prior engagement in the embodied construction of meaning – ‘always prior’ in the sense that the process of sense-making, even for the most supposedly ‘non-normative’ human subject, those whose verbal sign-making capacities are undeveloped or frustrated or diversely expressed, is always prior to their engagement with my own speaking self. What we have in common, to put it at its simplest, is the possibility of symbolic interaction, a possibility grounded in what is believed to be the fact that every embodied subject is from the first invited into symbolic interaction by the call of the divine. I speak to the other as to one who is already ‘spoken to’. The *distinctive* practice of a religious community

(as opposed to what it happens to be doing at any historical period, which is as likely as not to be inflected by various social mythologies) is a complex of strategies for warning us away from associating value with successful production, from thinking of successful production as earning the right to be heard.

The solidarity of speakers involves the acknowledgement that our humanity is continuously constructed as a movement of symbolic interaction. A speaker who employs coercion to silence or exclude another voice is thereby refusing themselves a possibility of 'world-construction' as well as denying it to the other. But this acknowledgement is also an acceptance of the limits of control – and thus of the durability of boundaries, in the sense that the otherness of another meaning-maker is a sign of where I cannot go, even in the most empathic awareness. I cannot occupy the point of orientation of anther speaker, not least because for *that* point of orientation *my* embodied reality is a boundary in a way that it is not for me. Yet the point about language is that a boundaried relation of this kind is *not* just about mutual 'impenetrability' (an idiom that needs careful treatment). We discover and rediscover what we can know of each other in the process of linguistic interaction; interpreted, as I have said, in a broad sense of 'linguistic'. We recognize one another as involved in the shaping of consistent and durable bodily strategies in our shared world, and so in the making of meaning, the mediating work of cooperative representation. The claim to

be an acknowledged participant in semiotic exchange does not depend on *success* in communication, but has to do with the recognition of a bodily space being inhabited by a biologically human organism engaged in 'mapping' that environment in its behaviour: 'finding a way'.[21] It is a model of what Brower Latz calls 'cooperative recognition in which social and economic achievements are not the central focus and rationale for recognition'.[22] 'Cooperative recognition': the work of language is irreducibly a shared enterprise and an ethic of language requires vigilance as to who is being denied their audible presence in this enterprise, and thus as to whom I am silencing by my speaking. And in the nature of the case, the only way of 'knowing' what misrecognitions are going on is in the silencing of the self's pre-critical agenda so as to invite the speech of the other – a social, political, economic and cultural exercise, not only one about the practice of speaking together.

Isobel Armstrong, in a very rich development of some Rosean ideas, offers a detailed commentary on a poem by Veronica Forrest-Thomson partly inspired by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. One line of the poem '(look at you, don't look at me)' is, on the face of it, the opposite of what a 'dispossessed' linguistic practice might seem to entail. But Forrest-Thomson adds a footnote: 'Do not ask yourself, "How does it work with me?" Ask, "What do I know about someone else?"' Armstrong comments on the apparent contradiction between the line and the note:

> In this doubling, you and me keep reversing, changing places, considering each other as objects, self and other taking it in turns to be decentred. Who is saying this? Self as subject has disappeared. An element, B, has emerged from the relation of A and C, B turns on itself and redescribes that 'first' relation.[23]

This is, for both Forrest-Thomson and Armstrong, a way into the consideration of metaphor – metaphor as a necessary 'renaming' of the environment in the wake of the 'doubling' described. Metaphor is one of those aspects of linguistic practice that most manifestly shows how the processes of interaction generate something new in the practice itself. The meanings we make are not another form of possession, to be either defended against rivals or floated on a market in which their worth can be rendered in terms that have nothing to do with their actual and embodied life. And, because of this, metaphor is not a denial but a genuine transformation of our first perceptions; we do not have to own and immobilize a perception for it to be viable, since it will live most freely in the generation of renaming and change. But this in turn implies that poetic practice, like religious practice, is in this sense unmistakably political when it is free to be itself, since it refuses commodification. It denies any reduction while licensing transmutation. It does not 'invest' the self's worth in a fixed and measurable form, whether a timeless and abstract ideal, or an optimally realized/achieved performance or actualization.

Armstrong goes on to explore some of these themes through engagement with another artwork, Anthony Gormley's 1995 sculptural installation *Field for the British Isles*, which consisted of a series of exhibition rooms filled with small clay figurines, each shaped with a rudimentary head and shoulders and two eyeholes. Initially, says Armstrong, the impression is of a barely differentiated mass of helpless individuals; but as the relatively enormous observer continues to look, the focus changes, and the helplessness is transferred from figurines to observer: we, the onlookers, are paralysed by the scale of what we don't know. 'There is no bridge to them.... What holds these beings together beyond their physical shape? Perhaps only their suffering? Perhaps nothing?'[24] But a further stage of contemplative looking at them discloses tantalizing hints of differentiation among the figurines, differences in mood and attitude within the uniform gaze of the crudely executed eye-sockets. The observer 'is in several places at once – inside, outside, gazing at, gazing from, fleeing, looking helplessly at the crowds', and the entire complex 'solicit[s] interpretation'.[25]

The relevance of this is that Armstrong is arguing for a retrieval of the sense of the artwork as 'a request for knowledge', and so of aesthetics as a discipline that deals with something quite other than art as a privileged and exclusive exercise of 'creativity'. Art, in inviting interpretation, requesting knowledge, invites the exploration of a shared world. It has something to do

with solidarity, not in providing reassuring tropes about how possible recognition is but in obliging us to stay with the *difficulty* of recognition, which duly becomes also a difficulty in recognizing and representing ourselves. The virtue of solidarity is not the perception of sameness behind apparent alienness, but the discovery that this alienness can address and be addressed. The strangeness of the other is a genuine boundary, but that boundary's line is not timelessly fixed, and the language of 'impenetrability' needs qualifying to the extent that – as in Armstrong's response to Gormley – we find we are in 'several places' in the course of a sustained linguistic interaction. Something is *learned* in this process; no one simply stays still. We find what we know but don't know we know; and what we don't know and don't know we don't know. Our knowledge is exposed to other 'knowledges', including the inaccessible knowledge of myself by the other. In this process of discovery, we become in an important sense 'strange' to ourselves; we become capable of reasoning about our identity in that we can ask about ourselves and our pre-critical agenda, 'Must this be?' We are able to negotiate genuinely shared goods to the extent that we can attend to others as active speakers who can undertake with us the 'cooperative recognition' that Latz discusses, the collaborative attention that is prepared to learn what is recognizable as 'good' to all participants in the exchange.

'THE ETERNITY OF SYNTAX'

In conclusion, we can, it seems, say with a degree of confidence that Rose's critique of an appeal to the self-evident, transparent recognition of a shared human plight or a shared human good is not a complete rejection of the idea of solidarity as a virtue, or even of any and every kind of discourse about the common good. What Rose's approach does is to warn us of where we shall end up if we fail to take mediation seriously – the process by which we think about our representation of our selfhood, our coming into our selfhood, our dependence for self-identity on the initiative and perception of others. It is true that our late capitalist culture, by homogenizing desire (everyone wants the same things) and commodifying its objects (everything – objects, services, relationships – can be rendered in terms of exchangeable value)[26] militates against any approach that wants to stay with the diversity of desire, and with the unavoidable time-taking of understanding and gratifying desire in a world of radically diverse agents, individual and collective. Accepting what Davis rightly sees as the 'idolatry' of commodity capitalism as if it were impervious to reason's challenge ('Must this be?') is a fundamental ethical error. But to push back at that error by appealing to immediacy – to the obviousness of human communality, to the persistence of empathic feeling, to over-hasty theologies of communion extended to the political realm overall – is not going to help. In place of the homogenized and commodified sameness of the market, the ultimate form of illusory

solidarity and trivialized recognition, all that the appeal to immediacy has to offer is a boundary-free affirmation of common interest that has never had to learn how to see its own conflicted 'investments' critically, or how to create the social and institutional forms that allow such thinking to work. It is an approach that risks – as Rose consistently argues – obscuring the coercion that enters in when we do not think about the nature of our thinking, since thinking – and therefore coherent acting – is inextricably bound up with the question of the other's self-relation. Ignore this and you will not see how your action may reinforce zero-sum divisions in society; nor will you learn by attending to what you can grasp of the other's perception of your self-relation.

Action arising out of solidarity is thus indeed – as Pope Benedict suggested in 2008 – action that may lead to sacrificial risk. It is conceivable in this perspective to recognize that the good I discover for myself is the good of making possible the good of another by a radical refusal of what seems the obvious good for myself. Rose's criticisms of Levinas and Weil for taking this 'abjection' of self as the normative and original site of ethical action are strong and persuasive; but they should not be read as ruling out sacrificial intervention. The really interesting and significant question is what narratives help us trace the processes by which such a point is reached. It is neither a self-cancellation, a love which violently removes its own agency from history (and so from actual mutuality), nor a triumph of heroic will (the ultimate assertion of

selfhood as the conquest of history and mutuality). It is – to return to the questionable binary that Rose teases out in her comments on Rosenzweig's work – 'a path through the world' in which self and soul are not separable. The charitable overflow of 'soul' is the action of a 'self' that has learned to think its own interest or need (or even calling) in terms of reciprocity and exchange: the free act of the subject is what it has been enabled or gifted to perform through the critical recognition of the other's engagement in critical self-scrutiny, a shared critical habit that makes space for construction, negotiation and growth. Self-preservation at another's expense is therefore the limiting of such a space and the reduction of a subject's embedded and embodied reality. It is to opt for an illusory and violent version of selfhood, a withdrawal from the contested – but not mutually murderous – world of language.

And the virtue of solidarity in such a framework becomes the willingness to *continue with language* so far as humanly possible – and so to attend in thinking and practice to what derails and corrupts linguistic exchange: what encodes or perpetuates unequal recognition, what pushes one speaker's self-relation into a mould determined by another, what purports to secure one speaker's identity against the effect of another's self-relatedness, and so on. This entails attention to the full range of social practice that may embody and enforce such aborted linguistic exchange, so that exercising 'solidarity' will be something that requires an intense and deeply resourced imaginative

practice. Such imaginative practice will, among other things, be a means of making oneself strange to oneself, in one mode or another: asking the 'Must this be?' question about one's own self-representations. As such, it can include many modes of discourse and reflection, from drama to liturgical confession – whatever makes possible the awareness of difficulty in relation, the difficulty that mandates time-taking: the 'middle' between, on the one hand, the despairing sanctioning of violence as the only means of managing contested meanings, persistent otherness, and, on the other, the sentimental aspiration of mutual recognition without friction, change and learning. Rose, in the late and fragmentary essay 'O! untimely death./ Death!', writes about 'the eternity of syntax' – about the continuing work of 'thinking or singing' that assimilates or narrates specific blockages, failures, reversals and misprisions without taking refuge in a kind of absolutized negation of all meaning.[27] Echoing Kierkegaard, Rose insists that 'trust without security ... does not make experience meaningless.'[28] And 'syntax' – a tantalizing word to use in this context – necessarily implies that the ongoing thinking and singing is a collaborative matter. To exercise solidarity is indeed, as the papal documents claim, the work of realizing shared goods of mind and body, identifying shared interest between strangers, challenging what obscures and distorts the fundamental interdependence of human agents. Rose's perspective insists that this task involves not only resisting the uncritical acceptance of division – of identities

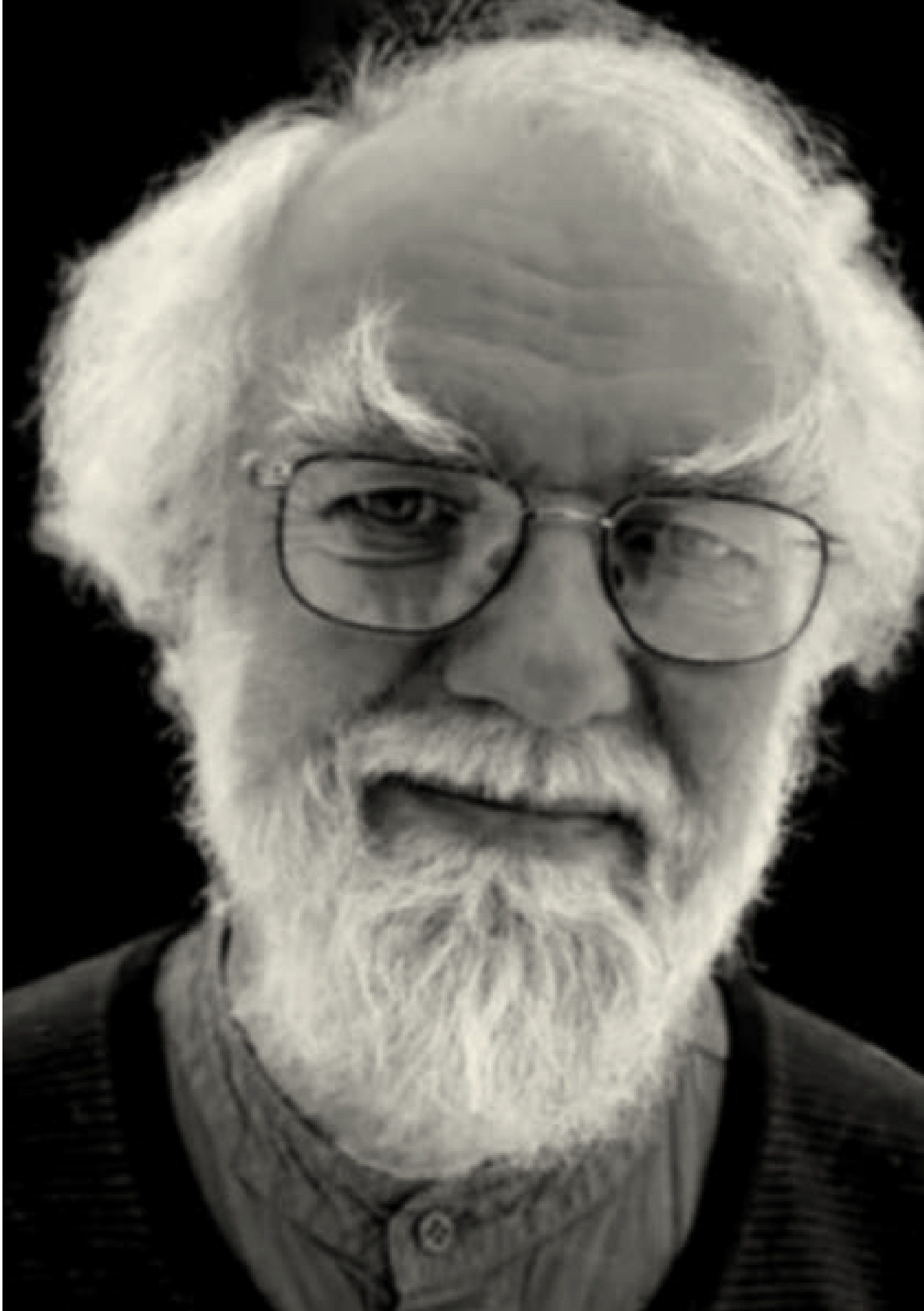
that cannot speak to each other – but also guarding against the risks of assuming timeless and universal identity, a human sociality beyond speech and history. Solidarity as a 'Rosean' virtue of critical thinking and action is to do with a reciprocal labour of meaning-making that does not render *diverse* experience meaningless; a virtue that honours time and difference (and thus difficulty) but without despairing of speech.

NOTES

1. Gillian Rose, 'Franz Rosenzweig – From Hegel to Yom Kippur', in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, pp. 127–54; p. 152. On Rose and Rosenzweig, there are some illuminating pages in Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith*, SCM, London, 2008, pp. 148–53.
2. 'Franz Rosenzweig', p. 152.
3. 'Angry Angels – Simone Weil and Emmanuel Levinas', in *Judaism and Modernity*, pp. 211–23; p. 221.
4. 'Shadow of Spirit', in *Judaism and Modernity*, pp. 37–51; p. 51.
5. The question was raised by Tony Gorman ('Gillian Rose and the Prospect of a Critical Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 105 (2003), pp. 25–36) and Peter Osborne (most recently in 'Gillian Rose and Marxism', *Telos* 173 (2015), pp. 55–67). It has been discussed at length in Joseph W.H. Lough, 'One Absolute Substance', in Joshua B. Davis, ed., *Misrecognitions: Gillian Rose and the Task of Political Theology*, Cascade Books, Eugene OR, 2017, pp. 143–74, and Joshua B. Davis, '"A Frenzy of Self-Deceit": Commodity Fetishism, Labor, and Rose's Critical Marxism', in the same volume, pp. 175–201. Both these latter make a strong case for reading Rose as consistently addressing and elaborating aspects of Marxism through her continuing concern with the production of value and the delusive nature of the supposed contract between labour and capital, with its systemic distortion of social relations. See, especially, Davis's essay, pp. 190–92. A clarification: Davis observes (p. 178, n13) that my own discussion of Rose in 'The Sadness of the King: Gillian Rose, Hegel, and the Pathos of Reason', *Telos* 173 (2015), pp. 21–36, makes only 'negative or dismissive' mention of Marx. I accept the reproach of not engaging at all adequately with Rose's treatment of Marx, but the allusions in the essay are specifically to what Rose identifies as insufficiently 'speculative' or critical varieties of Marxism, whose failures are parallel to those of other modern or would-be postmodern schemes. I entirely agree about the importance of her mature retrieval of Marxian themes in, for example, 'The Comedy of Hegel and the *Trauerspiel*', in Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1996, pp. 63–77, especially pp. 65–9.
6. See Alexander Smolar, 'Self-Limiting Revolution: Poland 1970–89', in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds, *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.
7. *Sollicitudo rei socialis,* no. 38 and 39. Popes Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI had already referred to 'solidarity' as a substantive principle. These sections of Pope John Paul's text are the main locus for an exposition of this, in terms, for example, of working for shared goods and refusing any action or policy that treats the other as instrumental. See also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Catholic Truth Society, London, 2016, sections 1939–1942, for a summary.

8. The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, Sect. V, especially no. 55.
9. Address to the Fourteenth Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, May 2008.
10. See, for example, Meghan J. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2014. For a secular appropriation of the language of solidarity as virtue, see, for example, Sarah B. Garlington, Mary Elizabeth Collins and Margaret R. Durham Bossalla, 'An Ethical Foundation for Social Good; Virtue Theory and Solidarity', *Research on Social Work Practice*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2019).
11. On this topic, see Anna Rowlands's authoritative and wide-ranging recent study, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times,* Bloomsbury, London, 2021.
12. Ken Leech, *The Sky is Red: Discerning the Signs of the Times*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2003, p. 34, referring to V.A. Demant, *Theology and Society*, Faber & Faber, London, 1938, whose opening chapter is on the topic of solidarity.
13. *The Sky is Red*, pp. 158–9.
14. Davis, '"A Frenzy of Self-Deceit"', pp. 192–5.
15. See Rowan Williams, 'The Sadness of the King'.
16. For some insightful treatment of Rose on universalism and social diversity, see Andrew Brower Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose,* Cascade Books, Eugene OR, 2018, pp. 167–89.
17. Andrew Brower Latz, 'Towards a Rosean Political Theology of Recognition', in Davis, *Misrecognitions*, pp. 47–66, and *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose,* pp. 202–7; p. 206.
18. I acknowledge here my debt to Andrew Shanks's emphasis on 'conversation' as a category in institution-building, both in his monograph on Rose (n1 above), and in other works such as *Faith in Honesty: The Essential Nature of Theology*, Routledge, London, 2005.
19. Davis, '"A Frenzy of Self-Deceit", p. 199.
20. Cf. Joseph Lough, 'One Absolute Substance', pp. 171–2.
21. And, incidentally, the implication is that non-human organisms engaged in constructing pathways of consistent behaviour in the environment have at least some analogical claim to be recognized as makers of meaning.
22. Latz, 'Towards a Rosean Political Theology of Recognition', p. 63.
23. Isobel Armstrong, 'Writing from the Broken Middle: The Post-Aesthetic', *Women: A Cultural Review,* vol. 9, no. 1 (1998), pp. 62–96; p. 89.
24. Ibid., p. 93.
25. Ibid., p. 94.
26. Michael Sandel's work is especially pertinent here, particularly his eloquent polemic *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, Penguin, London 2013.
27. Gillian Rose, 'O! untimely death. / Death', in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, pp. 125–46; p. 137.
28. Ibid.

ROWAN WILLIAMS has written widely on theological, philosophical and literary themes, and has published several discussions of Gillian Rose. He has taught at Cambridge, Oxford, Yale and Bristol; he was Bishop of Monmouth in Wales from 1992 to 2002 and Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012. He retired as Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, in 2020 and now lives in Wales. Among recent books are *The Tragic Imagination* (2016), *Looking East in Winter* (2021) and *Collected Poems* (2022).



In an atomized and individualistic culture we reach very readily for the ideal of 'solidarity' as a corrective. But the term is not straightforward: it can be used to suggest a ready-made harmony in social affairs waiting to be uncovered by the moralist or activist, in a way that short-circuits the necessity of naming and thinking through conflicts, understanding power and complicity, and learning the tools for critical scrutiny of one's own agenda as well as those of others. These themes are close to the heart of Gillian Rose's legacy. This lecture examines how her work can help us approach solidarity with a sharper ethical and philosophical eye, allowing us to see it as bound up with sharing in the project of language itself, as a practice that takes time, working towards a vision of shared good that involves both critical and reciprocally creative engagement.