

EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY FUND

NEWS & REFLECTIONS

(April 2009)

IN 1959, ONLY A COUPLE OF YEARS after Prof. Rosenstock-Huessy had retired from teaching at Dartmouth College, he accepted the invitation of a former student, Prof. Page Smith, to be a visiting professor at UCLA, where Smith was in the History Dept. The course Rosenstock taught there was entitled "American Social History," but as usual at least half of the class time was given over to *obiter dicta* that served to drive home one point or another. As always, too, Prof. Rosenstock-Huessy spoke without any written text before him, despite the risks.

Solidarity vs. Unanimity

EARLY IN THE COURSE, when discussing the importance of social change and openness to the future, Rosenstock focused on the concept of solidarity, a sentiment necessary he said to hold together groups of diverse people in the course of change. He noted that solidarity was a much more vital concept in Europe than in the United States (a prescient remark in that the Solidarity Movement in Poland led by Lech Walesa, which resulted in the end of the Soviet regime there, was still twenty years away).

One obstacle to solidarity, Rosenstock noted, is the application of labels or stereotypes to groups of people, which excludes them from the common purpose because we presume we already know them and what they think. In the early 1930s, when Rosenstock and the distinguished historian of Italy, Gaetano Salvemini, who was driven out of Italy by Mussolini, were teaching together at

Harvard, Salvemini lamented to Rosenstock that Americans all characterized Italy as a "Catholic" country, maybe because the Pope is there, when in fact, Salvemini said, Italy is no more Catholic than California. There are as many non-Catholics in Italy, according to Salvemini, in their heart of hearts as there are in any other country. The stereotype, Salvemini believed, was responsible for all sorts of misjudgments in American politics and foreign relations.

"Now you see what happens," Rosenstock continued, "if you do not understand that every man who is a human being must allow every other person also to be a human being. That is, to be at any one moment undecided, ... free [with regard to the question of] how much of the Roman Catholic past in Italy ... is valid, and how much has to be abandoned."

Racists, Rosenstock said, do this to each other. "So if you meet Negro royalty, and Negro barons, and Negro bank presidents, you don't recognize them because the Southerner will tell you that this is a mammy, or something like that, and other Negroes don't exist. They know all beforehand how anybody should look and should be."

"We transfix with our stare our fellow man. This is the great hindrance of history. That's why I told you that the second law of history is dependent on the free future, that we have to move forward in solidarity.... You can't leave behind somebody because you think you know already who he is.... Then he would never be able to join with us in this next task, would he, you see? You

would always have some people left behind, saying, 'They are hopeless. We know them too well....' "

Solidarity, Rosenstock cautioned, is not unanimity. We need "a plurality of ideologies,... people at the same time must think differently, and it's not the ideal of mankind to reach agreement on every point at any one time, as in mathematics.... Our political, our religious, our deepest convictions must be articulated in a variety of manners." Unanimity is not the goal of life; it's the goal of death.

"This goes far into politics. Mistrust any decision in any Congress or Parliament which is reached unanimously. That's usually a mob vote. Trust those votes that are [won] with one vote.... The French constitution in 1875 was passed with one vote in its favor.... And it lasted, after all, fifty-five years. That's a long time for a European constitution.... Mr. Adenauer was balloted in as chancellor of Germany with his own vote deciding. And he has been the most successful man in government in Europe for the last eight years.

"In science everything is wrong that is not unanimous. That's the very opposite.... [In history] opinions, and convictions, and faiths must be variegated. There has to be a plurality of ideologies. Otherwise future life is impossible."

Is the U.S. Now and Forever a Capitalist Country?

RETURNING TO THE DANGERS of labeling, Rosenstock continued:

"Now I give you a very stringent example. At this moment [it is 1959, Eisenhower is president], this country is in great danger because for the last ten years it has allowed itself to claim that it was a capitalistic country. It never was, and it never will be. It has always been a pluralistic country, economi-

cally speaking. There have always been different orders of economic [life]. There have been convents, and there have been endowed schools, and ... all kinds of orders that are not capitalistic in the least....

"The pluralism of economy, you see, is the only answer to the Communist tyranny. As long as the Americans pretend that they have nothing but a capitalistic system, the Russians are right, harping that there are other ways of doing business. And you will never settle this issue. You will only settle the issue if your future is as free as a bird, and you say, 'Any form of business which is effective, I shall use. I don't know yet.'

"This country ... was never founded on capitalism.... There has never been the word "capitalism" used [at the beginning]. It was a curse word. It was used by the Marxian to denounce liberalism. But never [had] the founding fathers adopted capitalism. It would have been scandalous.

"So you are in trap at this moment, ladies and gentlemen, because you have no future as long as you say that the 'United States' and 'capitalism' are identical. They have nothing to do with each other. We have tried every century a different form of doing business.... And obviously, in the jet age and the stratospheric age, you have to do business differently. There have already, of course, been wise men who ... stood up ... in 1935 or 1936—when was it?—and they made a very simple survey: 'Which things have to be done by free enterprise, which things have to be done by the state, which have to be done by international cooperation?'"

Rosenstock then descanted for a few minutes on the free enterprise necessary in the production of consumer goods such as clothing, which is so dependent upon individual taste, as contrasted with a fruit-growing cooperative in California

organized by the producers, and then the common enterprise of the so-called "individualistic" New England village, where everyone working together built the schoolhouse, the meetinghouse, the church. "This whole country has been built by cooperative enterprise and not by capitalism. And without this investment of free, cooperative effort, not one of us could be at this moment in this country."

"For the last ten years I have seen this with great dismay, the country is suddenly identified with capitalism. This wasn't so when I came to this country twenty-six years ago [in 1933]. Nobody thought that capitalism and the United States were absolutely the same thing. Why should [they be]? One is an '-ism' and the other is alive. '-isms' are just something, you see, for the upper, upper, upper dead part of the brain. Nobody has seen capitalism; it's a worm, a worm of the mind...."

"History is a constant battle of the whole of the community for its free future against partial realizations, against realizations that are partially true. Of course, partially this country is capitalistic. I would be a fool to deny it. But I deny that the future of the United States can be bound up with capitalism. If we please, we leave it behind, like a shell.... Capitalism is not more important than you and I. It's of very minor consideration. It's not important in the light of the historical march through time of a humanity that has gone in the last 700 years through at least seven economic systems.... We had feudalism. We had mercantilism. We had colonialism. We had manorialism. So we also had capitalism. And we had socialism. I can only tell you I care for neither of them."

In sum: "Catholic" Italy and "Capitalist" America, how to be imprisoned and impeded by labels. (*Classroom lecture 3, Feb. 13, 1959, University of California*)

The Non-Biological Problem of Reproduction

FOR A HUMANE RESPONSE to the painful human toll that the many benefits of capitalism require us all to pay, one must read pages 73 to 90 in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man* (1938), on the general themes of "The Limitations of a Market-Seeking Economy" and its fundamental failure in the "Reproduction of Man." Seventeen pages are too many to reprint here, but there is room for a few exemplary paragraphs. Composed seventy years ago, they have immediate relevance because they deal with problems mankind has not yet solved. Talk of sustainable agriculture and sustainable energy is everywhere at the moment, but still not enough about what it takes to nurture, sustain, and reproduce human beings capable of contributing to the betterment of the world.

Prof. Rosenstock-Huessy had the highest respect for the genius of Karl Marx but was keenly aware of where his perspective was too narrow.

"The Class-War between Capital and Labour is as true and untrue as the sex war between man and wife, the age war between the old and young, the border war between neighbouring groups. But the whole process is as complicated as the other conflicts mentioned above. In the struggle between the sexes the man can exploit the woman, and the woman can exploit the man; but there can also exist, after all, a happy marriage. In the Class-War, Capital can exploit Labour, but Labour can also exploit Capital, or there can be real peace as there was in England between 1850 and 1882, to the great disappointment of Marx. English workers exploited the world in peaceful co-operation with English capitalists from 1846 to 1914...."

"The real human question put by the waste of a market-seeking society," Rosenstock wrote "is the interest in reproduction, and not the wages paid by the producer for productive work.... The real problems of the future are to be found: not in the production of goods, because this is settled better than ever, but in the reproduction of real and all-round men...."

"The markets, their expansion and their shrinkage, prosperity and crisis remained changeable under one condition only: the employer could not be obliged to deal in his calculation with the fate of his employees. Starting on a race for bigger markets, he had to be freed from all responsibility for the political, moral, and educational order of his country. When a city was founded in 1250, the founders were responsible for the craftsmen of the place. As in marriage, they belonged to each other for better or for worse...."

"The capitalistic employer owes wages to a mercenary. The wages under the capitalistic system are much higher than in pre-capitalistic days. It is futile to find fault with the market-seeking system for paying low wages. The exploitation is not in the payment. The wages are as high as any mercenary army of the seventeenth century. The measure of the stipend always depended on the booty and the luck of arms."

"The relationship in the modern factory is not a relationship of exploitation. Nobody is deprived of the fruits of labour. Only the relationship is cut down to a certain number of hours in the day. And some fruits of human labour do not grow under such conditions. No harvest had been stolen, but the species Labour is limited to one certain kind of it, the kind which can be paid by hour, day or week."

"The tremendous novelty of the market-seeking system was the principle of payment by the hour. In all pre-capitalis-

tic times labour was related to the physical nature of man, and the shortest unit of work was, for that reason, a day. A man's work was paid by days, meaning that a day of twenty-four hours, with sunshine and moonlight, food and sleep, family life and resting time, stand as a natural vision before the mind of the employer. To hire a charwoman meant to take one day of her life, such as her life was."

"A modern worker at Zeiss-Jena, a wonder of precision though his work may be, is himself less to the factory that employs him than the charwoman was to her mistress. It is not his biographical day of day and night, of sunrise and sunset, that is bought by the firm...."

"In the card-index of a factory[,] men appear like any other force of nature. Water is used for three hours a day, electricity for six hours, men for eight or ten hours.... The only justifiable name for the workers in the factory is 'labour-forces.' All other expressions betray the truth...."

"We all work in shifts. We are all interchangeable. We have all lost our anchorage in the rhythms of a community. Who will regenerate the forms of social life which function like harvest home, and funerals, and sunsets, as the framework of our life?..."

"It is incredible how quickly a man degenerates without this background. The same chemist who as the assistant of a great explorer worked all his nights through for the sake of an experiment, will begin, as an employee of the dye trust two years later, to clean up his work-table at half-past three, because at four work ends for the day...."

And here we arrive at the core of the problem, the unsustainability of a market-seeking economy when it comes to human resources, no matter how "green" all of the other supplies or factors may be. The situation has not changed much in the seventy

years since Rosenstock wrote the passages below, although it is better in some countries in Europe than it is in the U.S.

The Reproduction of Man

"IT IS NOT VALID TO PRETEND that the workers are exploited by the capitalists because they get low wages. The real outcry of man's offended nature should be that he is degraded because his boss does not care for his past or his future, and because he, the worker, is deprived of the power to weave past and future into his own day of work.

"The boss, by virtue of the privileges conferred upon him by liberalism, hires a man's force and skill and presence and brains as a ready-made product. All the traditions that were needed to concoct this man's talents, and all the props that are needed to keep up his character, are degraded into his own private affair.... Modern society exchanges goods, and man is used as a ready-made product. His own mystic process of reproduction, his long way of birth, education, apprenticeship, discipline, hope and faith in the intrinsic powers of his nature—all this is of no interest to the businessman who hires him for an hour or a year or ten years. Schools, parents, friends, foundations, can take care of his personality. For his boss he is not a growing child of God, but a standardized labour-force, number such and such, output such and such, reliability such and such.... Electricity, coal, linen, have no past and no future. A labour-force has no past and no future."

The essential problem here, which Rosenstock saw clearly, is that for capitalism to thrive it must feed on those pre-capitalistic institutions and societies that shape capable workers but without exercising any serious concern for the society as a whole, let alone the individual worker. "The modern employer comes

into a settled community like a bull into a china shop. He lives by murdering the pre-capitalistic orders. But he and his own labour-forces still receive all the moral order they have, from the values of this same pre-capitalistic world which capitalism underbids." Labor unions in the U.S. and elsewhere protest the incredibly low wages paid by multi-national corporations in China or Mexico or Indonesia, but the problem goes far deeper. "The irresponsibility of the employer for the *reproduction* of the forces he hires, uses, and eventually destroys or wastes, is the curse of capitalism." The "real injustice of an acquisitive society" is that since its "great aim is to produce goods cheaply, it has no direct interest in reproducing men."

The prophetic words that follow, written seventy years ago, are not a lucky guess, a random exercise in "futurism." Early in his work, Rosenstock arrived at certain fundamental postulates regarding such matters as the purpose of education, the relationship of the generations, the nature of man, the structure of a healthy society, and so forth—from which all else flowed. In consequence, much of what he had to say in a variety of contexts is timeless because it reflected permanent truths.

"Suppose," he wrote, "all the kinds of raw material we use in our business begin to grow scarce: rubber, wood-pulp, children, poets; forest fires begin to destroy our timber, and droughts our fields.... At that moment the employer becomes deeply interested in the process of 'Reproduction'; a new world opens before his eyes: a world of change. The circular process of raising rubber, replanting forests, educating foresters, resettling the country, begins to present itself to the minds of business men who up to that time had thought of nothing but the logs they bought from the farmer who needed cash.

“Or again: artists, civil engineers, composers, publicity men are hired by an employer who assumes he can get them by a simple advertisement in the *Times* or *Herald*. But one day he discovers that this recruiting in the labour market does not work. Hundreds and thousands of men wish to be employed; and not one of them is up to the standard of the men he could buy on the market a year before.... No system has ever worked better than capitalism in producing goods, Rosenstock writes. “This side of capitalism cannot be improved by any nationalization.... Socialism is completely helpless if it aims to abolish the very best side of capitalism, its insuperable capacity for producing all kinds of ready made goods.” This we know well in the United States. But, he continues, “All life is production and reproduction at once. While the donkey turns the mill, the next donkey must be bred. While the coal is being burned, new coal mines or substitutes for coal must be found. While men are painting, teaching, buying, inventing, building and planning, new men must be recruited to dream of future building, planning, buying, and painting. The bad conscience of the employer about ‘reproduction’ often induces him to spend incredible sums for educational institutions. But in the modern world, these educational institutions have little chance to co-ordinate their activities so as to reproduce the kind of men who are the real need for the future.”

News from Europe

IT IS HEARTENING THAT TRANSLATIONS into languages other than English of wholes or segments of Rosenstock-Huessy’s work continue to appear, as well as monographic studies. The Fund has just received a copy of *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* (1946) in Rumanian, “Viitorul creștinului sau Depășim Modernitatea.” The Rumanian

edition was presented to the public on February 20, 2009, at the Protestant Academy of Transylvania in Sibiu. The event was attended by some fifty people, including Prof. Dorin Oancea with several students from Lucian Blaga University. One of Professor Oancea’s assistants, Dr. Alina Pătru, gave a talk on the book, in particular Chapter VII: “The Cross as Reality—Buddha—Laotse—Abraham—Jesus.” This led to an excited discussion, we are told, about the possibilities of true ecumenicism among the world’s religions. A participant observed that the *Christian Future* contained not a scintilla of Christianity, to which Professor Oancea responded that the book was not an attempt at theology of any kind.

However that may be, long before Zen and Yoga were fashionable, Rosenstock wrote in *The Christian Future*: “We shall gain strength ... if we ... invite the great civilizations of the Orient, China and India, under the Cross too. For the Cross is not an exclusive symbol of the egoism of one group; it is the inclusive symbol of the reunification of man, and every spark of life is welcome. ... Today [1945], Orient and Occident are shaken by a cataclysm which shows the insufficiency of both in isolation. A new penetration of the Cross is required which shall draw together the hearts of men in East and West by showing that each has some essential ingredient of life which the other needs. From the purity of Eastern eyes and ears we may learn to cure the destructiveness of our sciences and the feverish expressionism of our arts, while the religious and political stagnation of China and India may be overcome if they are shot through with the Christian power of death and resurrection”.

This is followed by a brief exposition of Rosenstock-Huessy’s assessment of the universal and fundamental agony of the human condition, that we are forever torn between

the space vectors of inside and outside, and the time vectors of past and future. The evocation of this “cross of reality” appears in scores of places in his work.

“Unlike the animals, man by his gift of speech is able to enlarge his grasp of reality in all four directions—his loyalty to past creation, his solidarity with other men, his power over nature, his love and faith in the future—yet, as we have seen, he is prone to get stuck on one front to the prejudice of the other three. The great re-directors [Buddha, Lao-tse, Abraham, and Jesus] have overcome this tendency to fixate by living each direction of the Cross to a paradoxical extreme, which emancipates us from the characteristic obsessions of that front. By emptying each direction of its accidental content, they enable us to re-enter the other fronts, and thereby assure the perpetual flexibility and movement of life.” (p. 174).

In Poland Zbigniew Jakubowski has translated Rosenstock’s “Farewell to Descartes” chapter (from *Out of Revolution*) into Polish, and he reports that his article on “Speech-thinking in Pursuit of Social Order and Peace by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy” (“Myślenie mowy w dążeniu do osiągnięcia ładu i tożsamości społecznej według Eugena Rosenstocka-Huessy”) will shortly appear in a leading academic journal in Warsaw.

In Germany the Rosenstock-Huessy Gesellschaft is in the process of publishing in PDF format a new edition of *Frucht der Lippen* (*Fruit of Lips*) in conjunction with the late Bas Leenman’s essay on “Lazarus und Johannes.” And from the Netherlands we received the sad news that Sam Hartman, a leader in the translation of Rosenstock-Huessy into Dutch, has died at the age of eighty-four. Hartman and his wife were among the founding families of the Rosenstock-Huessy Huis in Haarlem and lived and worked in the House for its entire

existence. Others in the Netherlands sustain that energy, most notably Feico Houweling, who only a few years ago translated all 800 pages of *Out of Revolution* into Dutch.

Notices

FEW OF ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY’S STUDENTS have contributed as much as Clint Gardner to keep Rosenstock’s inspiration alive. One of the founders of Argo Books and the editor of several key collections of Rosenstock’s essays published by Argo, Mr. Gardner is also the author of several works that to a large degree are based on Rosenstock’s thought. Most recently he has issued *Beyond Belief: Discovering Christianity’s New Paradigm*, the details of which may be found at: www.beyondbeliefgardner.com.

We are pleased to report, too, that many of the papers presented at the July 2008 “Rosenstock and Rosenzweig” conference at Dartmouth College will be published in the next year as a collection edited by Prof. Wayne Cristaudo and Ms. Frances Huessy. The book will include some new material, not presented at the Dartmouth event, notably several pieces by Rosenstock relating to the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche.

We remind our readers that Prof. Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago, an eminent historian of American religion and much else, the author of some fifty books, will be delivering a lecture on Rosenstock-Huessy on Friday, July 11, 2009, 5:00 p.m., at Dartmouth College. Marty has been commenting on Rosenstock-Huessy for many years, certainly as far back as his charming brief autobiographical memoir, *By Way of Response*, published in 1981.

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The Fund wishes to recognize and express its deepest gratitude to those who contributed to its work in 2008. The Fund is totally dependent upon contributions. The list below records donations made for any purpose in the course of the year.

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