

EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY FUND

NEWS & REFLECTIONS (September 2008)

Rosenstock and Rosenzweig Conference

THE CONFERENCE held on the Dartmouth College campus July 11 and 12 was pathbreaking in that six of the nine presenters had never before spoken or written a word about Rosenstock-Huessy. As we mentioned in a newsletter last year, the current flourishing interest in Franz Rosenzweig in academic circles is to some degree generating interest in his close friend Rosenstock-Huessy; but much credit must be given also to the persuasive powers of Prof. Susannah Heschel at Dartmouth, who induced colleagues near and far to pay heed to Rosenstock and to speak about his thought at this gathering.

For those of us who long ago were captivated by Rosenstock-Huessy's often astonishing insight, there is always the lingering doubt that maybe we are somehow peculiar or, even worse, "true believers" who have abandoned their critical faculties when it comes to our appreciation of this great German émigré. How reassuring it is, then, to see fresh faces on the scene, approaching Rosenstock's work without predilection or prejudice and finding it deserving of the

most serious attention. "Attention," obviously, does not mean total approbation, which is never expected. But what is precisely needed now, above all, after the paying of heed, is critical examination, penetrating interpretation, and the evocation of historical context which together will fathom the depths, uncover the architecture, and test the originality of Rosenstock's thinking, whether one agrees with him or not on any question.

History

To summarize here each of the papers presented at the conference is impossible, but phrases stand out. Rosenstock-Huessy clearly believed that there is a universal history of mankind, a structure and a direction evident in the course of many centuries controverting Hamlet's fear that life is no more than a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing. The notion that humankind has a destiny is embodied in Judaism and Christianity, and from that source, by one means or another, the message was disseminated to the entire world. Everywhere, miraculously, the present year is 2008, and the substitution of the politically correct C.E., if anything, emphasizes even better than A.D. what has been

achieved in two millennia of striving amidst unending catastrophes.

This subject received healthy discussion in the two days of the conference, and the term that Prof. H. Michael Ermarth brought forward to characterize it was not the old-fashioned providentialism, or divine design, concepts that Rosenstock himself never sought refuge behind. Instead, it was asked whether there is an invisible “watermark” underlying history. What is more subtle than a watermark! Who made the paper upon which the narrative is written? But don’t look skyward for the answer; look inward. “Man is the animal who can be inspired,” to quote Rosenstock.

One unexpected benefit of Professor Ermarth’s presentation was the dispelling of the charge sometimes heard that Rosenstock-Huessy was misogynistic. Feminine contributions or “gifts,” Ermarth noted, are “utterly integral to the timeless existential watermarks that suffuse all times” in Rosenstock’s philosophy of history. “Western man . . . includes Western woman—albeit in the background or watermark sense that it is always somehow more significant than the male-dominated fuss of the foreground and top echelons. These reverentially female-friendly comments recur constantly in [Rosenstock’s] writings. . . . Balancing his respect for the ‘warrior,’ [is] his esteem for the eternal feminine.”

Education

The conference made evident how much there is yet to be said about Rosenstock-Huessy’s varied and profound writings on education, as it is conducted on all levels. In his first decade in the United States, Professor Rosenstock gave talks at such places as Wellesley College, to a class reunion (“The Rhythm of Society: Life and Learning Co-ordinated,” 1934), and at the Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts (“Soldiers of the Impossible,” 1942), and we have among his works in English from that period “Man Must Teach” (ca. 1940), which is available in photocopy from Argo Books. As usual, he defies the conventional thinking and illuminates and imbues with import what usually passes without notice. For example:

“Never once does [John] Dewey tell us why he must write his books or go on teaching. In discussing the foundations and underlying principles of education, the only regard he shows is for the little victims of our educational activities. The teacher is happily taken for granted. That he might be just as vitally affected as the student, injured, harmed, shellshocked, perfected, is no concern of most educational discussions.

“Does this lack of reciprocity result from the idea that a teacher is a paid employee and that his salary is his reward? But if the pay is all he gets out of teaching, then teaching would be nothing in his life; and then, he can’t be a good teacher. Nevertheless, educational theory modestly treats the sufferings of the

teacher as *pudenda* not to be mentioned in good society. The parents, the pupils, the alumni, the public, are told why such and such a treatment will give the boy or girl the best possible education. A ware is sold. And this discredits our theories of education as advertising.

“Any realistic approach would have to show how and why and that an adult can be induced to fool around with young people in this business of teaching and learning, some sporadically, some professionally, but all passionately.” (“Man Must Teach,” pp. 3-4).

Time

The nature of time was a major topic of discussion in the past century—think of Bergson or Heidegger, to mention just two prominent philosophers—but it is doubtful that anyone in the era made time so fundamental a factor in understanding God, man, and the world as Rosenstock-Huessy did. And some of the writing on time by philosophers coming after Heidegger mask lack of true insight into the subject with paragraphs of abstruse, and possibly nonsensical, jargon. Rosenstock is luminous on the subject, not opaque.

An entire book could be written about Rosenstock-Huessy’s view of time. It is basic to his thinking in every category. In a 40-minute presentation at a conference, a speaker can, at best, only touch on the matter. Time for Rosenstock is after all a subject to be considered in philosophy and theology, in sociology, in history, in psychology, although none is disparate. We were fortunate that Prof. Peter

Leithart, who has the courage and the capacity to speak informatively about Rosenstock-Huessy and time, offered to do so.

Rosenstock resented and ridiculed the prevailing, near universal, reduction of time to an appendage of space, the so-called fourth dimension. That description is simply a victory for the physicists, as though they had a corner on reality. Time itself has three dimensions, and “Man,” Rosenstock said, “is a peculiarly temporal being, ever but a pilgrim and an exile in the world of space” (“Teaching Too Late, Learning Too Early” [1940], in *I Am an Impure Thinker*, p. 92).

Leithart finds Rosenstock-Huessy nearly unique in his integration of sociological and theological accounts of time, and suggests that his analysis of the present, sandwiched between past and future, historically so problematic and misunderstood, is “the most fruitful philosophical insight into the nature of time,” surpassing St. Augustine’s famous account.

Judaism Despite Christianity

As planned, three papers related to Franz Rosenzweig and his classic correspondence with Rosenstock, published fifty years later as *Judaism Despite Christianity* (1969). Certainly one of the great outcomes of their exchanges over more than fifteen years, by which both men were deeply influenced, was their common realization that Judaism and Christianity are

forever interlocked. The mission of the latter is to carry the central Jewish message to the world; the mission of the former is to stand permanently as a guardian against Christian backsliding into paganism.

These passing remarks about the July conference merely skim the surface, but it is likely that some results of the stimulus provided by the event will be evident in scholarly journals in the next few years. Then one hopes for the transition from the specialized and sometimes esoteric academic journals to classroom teaching, and from the teaching into the minds of students, undergraduate and graduate, who will in time write books that convey to a wide audience the significance of Rosenstock-Huessy's work.

No plans are afoot to publish as a group the papers from this conference. As noted, some will find their way into print individually. Readers desiring copies of a paper should write to the author directly, via e-mail or post.

A Ruminatio

ENCOURAGEMENT THAT this circulatory process, from academic journal to general public, is underway may be drawn from another memorable phrase heard at the conference, uttered by Prof. Donald Pease, who characterized Rosenstock's writing as "breath-takingly edifying." "Edifying"

is definitely one of the right words to describe Rosenstock. Listening to him or reading him is always elevating and enhancing to human dignity because so much that we ordinarily take for granted is movingly invested by him with new purpose and meaning.

To ruminate a bit, it is an illusion of those living at any time in history that they are somehow self-sufficient and at the pinnacle of human achievement. In particular today, the incredible progress in science and technology since the seventeenth century reinforces this false notion. Rosenstock-Huessy like no one else makes manifest our dependence on several thousand years of cultural and institutional inheritance, which is mostly invisible and must be recalled and elucidated when needed for our salvation.

What is the bedrock upon which even the enterprise of natural science is built? Did it sprout up like a weed with no human sacrifice and cultivation? What are its social, political, indeed, religious roots? "The paradoxical truth about progress, then," Rosenstock writes, "is that it wholly depends on the survival of massive institutions which prevent a relapse from a stage which has once been reached" (*Out of Revolution*, p. 31). To forget this fact is to run the risk of undercutting the very ground upon which we stand. Do the scientists themselves know what they owe to ancient social forces beyond their

laboratories and controlled experiments that have nothing to do with the actual practice of science?

On the other hand, institutions need renewal and must always be open to inspired change. One of the reasons that Rosenstock-Huessy is not easy to classify politically is that he aimed for the balance between respecting the past while at the same time opening the way to progress. He once described himself as a “counter-reactionary.” His expressed preference was for conservative revolutionaries or revolutionary loyalists. “Reconquest of our era” was a favorite expression—that is, the necessity of recapturing the contributions of the past, going all the way back to the immense creativity of tribal culture (from which, yes, Rosenstock believed we still must draw sustenance). Nothing of value in the past is *finally* superseded. The reconquest of our era prevents us from jettisoning what we may need to navigate the future without catastrophe.

The Rosenstock-Huessy Archive

THE PERSONAL PAPERS of Prof. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy have remained more or less inaccessible in his Norwich, Vermont, home since his death in 1973, with the exception only of the over 1,000 letters by Franz Rosenzweig to Rosenstock-Huessy’s wife, Margrit Huessy. These Rosenzweig letters, written between 1917 and 1922,

sometimes referred to as the “Gritli Letters,” after Margrit’s nickname, were some time ago deposited in (not donated to) the Dartmouth College Library for safekeeping, with no legal transfer of ownership.

In the past spring, Mrs. Mariot Huessy, the widow of Dr. Hans R. Huessy, who was the son and heir of Margrit and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, decided to donate to Dartmouth all of the Rosenstock papers and the Gritli letters. This magnificent gift is made in memory of Margrit Huessy. The Board of the Rosenstock-Huessy Fund has for years longed for this development, since it greatly improves the physical security of the papers against all hazards, and once at Dartmouth they will be properly catalogued and made accessible for research.

That Rosenstock taught at Dartmouth from 1935 to 1957 makes this generous decision by Mariot Huessy fitting. There is already at the College a collection of most of his publications and other related material, donated in the 1980s by the Huessy family and by Freya von Moltke. It is relevant, too, that when Professor Rosenstock first arrived at Dartmouth in 1935, as a recent émigré, he sold his personal library to the College as a means of raising money to buy a house in Vermont.

The papers donated to Dartmouth, spanning the years roughly between 1913 and 1970, include copies of letters

by Rosenstock-Huessy to some 225 correspondents, and letters to him from some 325 correspondents. Although the collection has not yet been catalogued, it is known that there are over 4,000 pages of letters from Rosenstock-Huessy to his wife Margrit, and that a number of prominent religious thinkers are among those addressed, including Karl Barth, Martin Buber, and Paul Tillich.

Letters to Rosenstock-Huessy in the collection, aside from the names above, include such figures as W. H. Auden, Max Born, Emil Brunner, Rolf Gardiner, Karl Lowith, Lewis Mumford, Page Smith, Dorothy Thompson, J. H. van den Berg, and Alfred North Whitehead.

A large group of letters, to and from, are with Rosalind and Henry Copley Greene, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who assisted with the publication of Rosenstock-Huessy's first major book in the United States, *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1938).

The Rosenstock-Huessy Papers include substantial material related to Camp William James (1939-1941), the work camp in Vermont organized by Rosenstock-Huessy and a group of Dartmouth and Harvard students. The camp was intended to elevate the Civilian Conservation Corps, introduced by Pres. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal as an economic and social relief program, into a model for a true

national service corps enlisting members from all classes. The story of Camp William James was recounted in a book with that name written by Jack Preiss and published in 1978 by Argo Books.

Throughout his life, advocacy of work service was an ongoing theme for Rosenstock-Huessy, which he summarized in a 1965 publication, long before the subject became fashionable, *Dienst auf dem Planeten—Kurzweil und Langeweile im dritten Jahrtausend* (Stuttgart). The book was translated into English in 1978, somewhat abridged, as *Planetary Service: A Way into the Third Millennium* (Argo Books).

Also in the collection of papers donated to Dartmouth are poetry and sermons by Rosenstock-Huessy, manuscripts of published and privately circulated works, and family history. It should be noted that the bulk of the collection is in German.

A Chronological Guide to the Works of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy compiled by the Dutch scholar Lise van der Molen (Argo Books, 1997) lists over 600 titles, totaling at least 35,000 pages. Over 400 hours of his stirring classroom lectures at Dartmouth in the 1950s have also been preserved.

With this acquisition, the Dartmouth Library becomes the principal archive in the United States for the study of the life and work of Rosenstock-Huessy and an important destination, as well, for students of Franz Rosenzweig. There is also a

Rosenstock-Huessy archive at Bethel in Bielefeld, Germany.

One hopes that the establishment of the Rosenstock-Huessy Archive at Dartmouth will encourage donations to the College of other collections of letters from Rosenstock that remain in private hands.

Martin Marty to Speak on ERH

IT IS MANY MONTHS AWAY, but readers may want to think about visiting Hanover, New Hampshire, on Saturday, July 11, 2009, where Prof. Martin E. Marty will deliver a lecture on Rosenstock.

Professor Marty, now retired from the University of Chicago where he taught for thirty-five years in both the Divinity School and the History Department, is among the very most distinguished of American academicians. The author of dozens of books,

particularly on American religion, he has also been for fifty years an editor of the *Christian Century* magazine. He has received numberless awards including over seventy honorary degrees. The Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago, which Professor Marty founded, was recently renamed the Martin Marty Center and serves as the conference and program arm of the Divinity School.

Rosenstock has been a source of inspiration to Marty for decades. In an autobiographical memoir published in 1981, *By Way of Response*, Professor Marty recounted Rosenstock's influence on him, and he came back to that subject again two years ago in the Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture he delivered to the American Council of Learned Societies.

N. F.

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