

Rodomontade: The Attack on the Student as Pedagogical Tactic

W. Thomas Duncanson

Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois USA

[For the Rosenstock-Huessy Roundtable, Norwich, Vermont USA, 6-7 July 2006.]

Today the college and university professor of communication is expected to strictly follow a syllabus of information and concepts, and the experiences and exercises that support the mastery of those concepts, all expressible as learning objectives. Preferably, these objectives are in some sense measurable. Perhaps even more importantly, these objectives are expected to exist within the framework of the actual or implicit approval of one's peers. For beginning teachers especially, there is a tacit threat that departing from the approved body of field relevant information, methods, and point of view will be fatal for their careers. Few of these beginning teachers risk encountering what is disciplinary about our "discipline." No matter what sophisticated doubts one's education has caused one to have about positivist notions in epistemology, it is always safest to build one's courses on the assumption that one is to work with carefully qualified probabilities concerning impersonal knowledge, and where absolutely necessary to invoke consensus norms.

And yet, there is the Socratic spur that we are to know ourselves, our selves and our students' selves presumably becoming at least part of the subject matter of our teaching. There was a time not so long ago when the nascent field of communication studies boomed with its affiliation with a movement in lifestyle and aspiration that can be described as the "human potentiality movement;" there is still ample talk about "transforming the lives of students," not just with vocational skills or even civic competencies but with wrenching insight into the human predicament, penetrating self-understanding, and courageous habits of personal disclosure, all offered as the tools for constructing relationships of surpassing depth and flexibility.

While part of the pedagogy of communication education for human potentiality was based on extraordinary sympathy and support for the student (when this writer completed a teacher training program at a state university in the mid-1970s we were told almost every day that we must love our students), part of it was based on confrontation with the student, *attacking* the student's defense mechanisms and sometimes even her malignant bourgeois assumptions, undermining the student's propensity for manipulative communication gambits that are usually learned in dysfunctional families in order to protect unhealthy selves from the risk of painful, if productive, change.

The first day of the first college-level communication course I ever had, the teacher emerged from the corner of a darkened theater, and announced that we all had "crap in our heads, and I am going to get it out." The course was designed as an attack on the students. Many were receptive to this approach; others were not. This was the most polarizing course at the entire university at that time, and the teacher held his rejection was a badge of honor and proof he was essentially correct in his on-going accusations about his students' bad faith.

Attacking students remains as one of the perennial tactics in the classroom. Its most common form would be the attack on the student's intellectual ability, background, and habits. Many students experience times in the classroom when they feel their politics and / or religion is being negated or under attack. Indeed, is it not the case that the university has always represented the cosmopolitan universe

against the merely local version of the world? In recent years when, for many lower middle and middle-middle class families, raising children has consisted of drawing the family tight against a dangerous, competitive, and even hostile community, is it not the case that college teaching has consisted of attempting to *overcome* what dad and mom and high school and coach have used to fortify our young against the larger world? Like it or not, the college professor can end up ranting, about if not to, the ideological blinders that inhibit almost every classroom, every person, every project under their direction. The whole vocabulary of human potentiality may seem quaint today, not at all a wised up postmodern sensibility, but the sense that we are frustrated in our potential goes on and sometimes explodes among us.

“Rodomontade” is ranting, blustering talk. The term is derived from a character in opera who had the propensity to speak in this way. Rodomonte was a comic character, a buffoon, and when we rave about our students, and the families and communities from which they come, we are reminded that our ranting is probably ineffective, and unintentionally funny. We need to think about this as teachers. This is a paper about one teacher who taught at Dartmouth from the 1930s to the 1950s, who ranted and berated his students. By many accounts he was remarkably popular, and this paper can be written today because his student in the 1950s loved him so much they went to the trouble to rig an old “wire” tape recorder to catch and preserve his every lecture. Indeed, his students so esteemed this teacher they founded a publishing house, Argo Books, to keep his works in print and have had all of those thousands of pages of lectures they captured on tape transcribed, and those transcriptions and copies of the audio tapes are made available from that publisher. The teacher’s name is Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. He wrote and spoke almost every day about speech and language, and did so under the pre-text of lecturing about Greek philosophy, universal history, comparative religion, and social thought. Associated in the history of ideas with Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig as the great “German speech thinkers and philosophers of dialogue,” Rosenstock-Huessy, who had been educated in legal history at Heidelberg, spoke eloquently about monumental and sobering topics, but he found ways to comment almost every day on the emptiness of modern values and the cowardice of American life. In other words, almost every class period, turned out to be about his students, and this critical insertion of their own lives into the great historical and theoretical narrative may explain those students’ enduring interest in his work. We need to think deeply about this matter of attacking our students, as we need to think about other questions of whom, how, when, and why we teach.

A Brief Introduction to Rosenstock-Huessy

With a few exceptions, no matter the announced topic, Rosenstock-Huessy wrote about speech. About speech he was ebullient, euphoric; and about the absence or corruption of speech he was menacing, portentous. Consider just a few of these bold remarks: “By human speech, space and time are created.”^[1] “By speech . . . we contribute actual power to the life of society.”^[2] “In speaking, the acts of mortal men are lifted up to the level on which they become unforgettable because they are communicated.”^[3] “By speaking, the individual makes himself a cell of one tremendous body politic of speech. Open your lips, and you have ceased to be yourself. You have become a member, and you occupy an office and you govern one kingdom of the whole world.”^[4] “Speech was established to call forth life.”^[5] “Human speech corresponds to the construction of our brain so as to permit the transfer of acquired experiences to the race. Speech enables us to gain times and spaces for ‘settling’ a question.

Speech *connects* the departments of experience.”[6] “All speech rides the future of a new heaven and a new earth. All speech draws out the speaker from behind his isolation into a realm of commonality with the person or persons who listen. This is not a mere fantasy; some material partition in space and some historical bridge through time must result from speech when it is in full force.”[7] “Speech is our victory over individual death. It does not abolish death but triumphs over it.”[8] “And we *are* chiefly through the medium of human speech and conversation.”[9] “He who speaks . . . is reborn by his own words.”[10] “Speech blends the two processes of pure thought and pure action.”[11] “The living speech of a community results from the polarization of acts and thoughts; like the spark which crosses the dark gap between the positive and negative pole of electricity, speech is a flaming arc connecting different generations.”[12] “Through speech, the life on earth reaches a new level of prismatic reflection on its own processes.”[13] “Human survival and revival depend on speech.”[14]

On the ominous side Rosenstock-Huessy wrote, among other things: “But in any given moment, society is imperiled by the loss of common speech between generations and classes and nations and continents. And the reality of this danger increases today because language is abused today on a colossal scale so that whole groups will turn off the radio or not buy a certain book because they mistrust this source of information forever.”[15] “A speechless universe means madness for the individual, chaos for the things of the world, and *mere violence to keep order between man . . .*”[16] “We have to be spoken to lest we go mad or fall ill.”[17] “It takes the common adventure of all mankind, and the constant translation of one type of language into all other types to save us from madness, indifference, hatred, and forgetfulness.”[18] “Without the signposts of speech the social beehive would disintegrate immediately.”[19]

1

It is likely no other author has ever strung together a more impressive set of claims on behalf of speech. The new reader of Rosenstock-Huessy may be disconcerted by his mounting declarations about speech, language, and communication; but the experienced reader of Rosenstock-Huessy knows how to locate these claims intellectually, if only tacitly. Compared to a host of other philosophers, psychologists, linguists, semioticians, and rhetoricians, who have built up or contributed to a theory of discourse, Rosenstock-Huessy developed a theory of the discourser. In the work of Rosenstock-Huessy we pass irretrievably from mechanics, hydraulics, technics, topology, pragmatics, and calculation, to philosophical anthropology—the antechamber of ethics. By now we are quite familiar with the argumentative turn, ancient, modern, and contemporary, that the human being is not first or primarily *homo sapiens* but *homo loquens* (the speaker) or *zoon logon ekhon* (a living being capable of speech).[20] We are also not surprised when we find these claims proximate various moralizings, or now even when they are parlayed into systematic post-Kantian versions of duty and competency.[21] Whether or not we are comfortable with the gigantic conceits of philosophical anthropology, we must come to grips with the idea that way out past our supposedly radical but now commonplace proposition that “reality is socially constructed

through language” stands Rosenstock-Huessy’s conviction that we are vaulting creatures created out of endless neediness in call and response.

1

Over and again, Rosenstock-Huessy went to speech to discover and frame in more concrete terms the being beneath the distractingly glorious cultural armor who cannot fathom either its own fragile accomplishments or its inescapable vulnerability.

His work was meant to preserve the complexity of the human predicament by avoiding both vague generality and deadening detail. Rosenstock-Huessy had no patience for thinkers who made optimistic, or reductive, or complacent, or cynical assumptions about the character of human existence. If he were also impatient with providing evidence for his numerous assertions about speech and language, he implied the evidence is everywhere, and kept to his alarms that we are in peril.

The social construction, cultural hegemony, and language coercion hypotheses in which we customarily traffic in communication studies have been damned as unverifiable in the maddening sense that every bit of data is absorbed in these claims. Rosenstock-Huessy’s conception of the discourser is also a theoretical enormity, bullying beyond the boundaries of evidence, verification, and qualification; but it is even more intimidating than that. Because these writings are about the discourser, they are about us, our whole selves, not some small department of our upbringing, understandings, commitments, or social location. These works demand we submit our own lives as the evidence, and they limn the accusation that we have misunderstood the terms of our entire existence and have lived wrongly.

Rodomontade

1

Rosenstock-Huessy did not always or even usually rant and rage at his students. But in the transcripts of his lectures from the 1950s and 1960s he sometimes certainly did bluster and rail, and it is not inappropriate to employ the simile of the fool Rodomonte for Rosenstock-Huessy and all those others who have cursed the emptiness, sterility, and the stupidity of these times.

Rosenstock-Huessy told his students in “Universal History” at Dartmouth in May 1956:

I have to teach you, gentleman. I’m not prepared. I was educated to teach adults. Now here I’m a schoolteacher, in a so-called American low school. After high school, you know, we have this wonderful arrangement in America that after high school follows low school, called “college.”

I’m not your teacher, gentlemen, by birth, and by ... intention. I have to do it. But it’s the wrong arrangement. But this is the time, the machine age. It’s the best we can hope for. The time is going for another type of education. I think we’ll get more and more this modern mass man who --who doesn’t care, and is indifferent, and says, “Oh, everything’s the same, why should I learn all these... distinctions? Why should I learn these names, these epochs?” Most of you think it is just nonsense.[\[22\]](#)

A few minutes later he told those same students they did not know what history is and that they had no friends, only roommates and chums, and that is why they needed psychoanalysts to really *listen* to them.

[23] He told them their callousness and indifference guaranteed that the U.S. would perish.[24]

Rosenstock-Huessy opened one day with his students in “Comparative Religion” by saying:

I have great trouble discussing these things, as you are unable to observe yourself-- your own experiences. You are absolutely incapacitated. You live absolutely abstract, because you actually believe more in what the people in school have told you. You have lived 20 years in school, and so all your senses of inner-- the inner man are blunted. You cannot make an experience, gentlemen. And that's why this man had to ask me what I mean by gravity. He thought it was something from the books. I just meant his posterior. And he wouldn't believe it. But I'm speaking of your, gentlemen, naked, without your certificate of a school. And you cannot understand this, gentlemen, because you are-- haven't come to life yet. And therefore its very hard for me...[25]

1

Not only did he find his students of that era out of sync with their own experience and too quick to rely on authority and academic apparatus, he found them uncomprehending.

Cratylus is a disciple of Heraclitus, and he was so disgusted at the end with the world that he would only nod his head, and move his little finger, because he said, “Everything is misunderstanding.” Quite a man. He probably was right. I very often have this feeling here at Dartmouth College. And I leave-- shall leave you, gentlemen, after this term-- this year with the firm conviction that it has made no difference that I have been here or not, that the misunderstandings are just as numerous as the understanding. And so the-- the equation is zero.

Cratylus is right. Today the basis of understanding is lost, because you do not expect understanding in the city of man. You live in nature. And bo- -- nature boys, gentlemen, cannot be spoken to. You want to have definitions. You get what you want. Anybody gets what he wants, because he will not accept anything else. Gentlemen, you cannot give anything to anybody who doesn't want it. And since you do not expect living truth, but only dead truth, you get dead truth. This cannot— that has been my fate here for 20 years in this college. Most of you expect something to learn by heart. You expect assignments, to read three pages a day. And that you think is intellect and mental life. You end up with these mechanic— mechanized examinations with “yes” and “no.” Well, gentlemen, that's good for donkeys, and for horses. It is not good for men. I mean, you remain on the— on the— on the level of a trained animal, because the world of objects is for trained animals, because man is there alone with the world of objects. But we live— the highest order of life, gentlemen, is to come to an agreement, although we do not see the same objects.[26]

A few weeks later he turned on the same class calling them “illiterates” and excoriating them for their latest term papers.

Gentlemen, you are illiterates. You have unlearned to read a real book of any difficulty. And you even disclaim your duty to write— read a book that is difficult. You say, “I don't write— read books that are difficult.” It's just a denunciation of your own stupidity, gentlemen. Only books that are difficult are worth reading, obviously. Why should you read a book that is light? I mean, then you can go to a burlesque show right away.

1

But you— all your values in reading books are distorted. The whole problem of Heraclitus or of the gre— greatest minds of— of Greece is that you have to think about of these sentences 20 times before the-- understand how deep they are, and how— how appli— wide their application is. And so I must say, I resent this— this— these Platos— papers on Plato. They all show very clearly that not one of the— you has taken the trouble of reading a dialogue of Plato twice. Perfectly meaningless. No book, gentlemen, of any value is a book that deserves to be read once.[\[27\]](#)

Earlier that term he had shamed the same students, asking:

You know Willa Cather's book, do you? *One of Ours*? Who has read it? Gentlemen, that's one of your tragedies. Who has read Willa Cather's book, *One of Ours*? But gentlemen, Willa Cather is one of the great souls of the last 30 years. But you only live with the last moment. How can you-- there be any American literature field if a person like Willa Cather is not familiar to you? Gentlemen, you can buy the legs of Marilyn by the dozen. They're valueless. Why do you do that?[\[28\]](#)

Rosenstock-Huessy tried to put his young charges in place by calling them “playboys”[\[29\]](#) and by mocking their penchant for playing cards and golf.[\[30\]](#) That he could weave these judgments through a wending discourse on Homer, Zeno, Lucretius, etc., must have been variously intimidating, incomprehensible, or bizarre to most of these students.

Mostly, and here we can hear the echoes of the great intellectual obstacle of his life-- Nietzsche, whom Rosenstock-Huessy felt obliged to adapt to what he took to be the central themes of the Christian understanding of history, he said they were *dead*.

The death of souls, gentlemen, is-- nobody could be so dead as you are and try to be made in our college education. So superfluous, so silly, so worthless, so only out for the stomach and for-- for the-- sex and such things. I mean, such a man-- humanity has not been tolerated before.[\[31\]](#)

1

He told his students in “Cross of Reality” in January 1954 that mostly they lived their life at “... 35 degrees. But the anabiotic existence, which you lead here in college, I mean, that's not living. But it's this tin-can existence.”[\[32\]](#) And to those students in “Greek Philosophy” he was so hard in 1956-57, he opined in the final days of the term, “Anything that wants to-- to come to life dreads its coming into life. Life is dreadful, gentlemen, or it isn't life. Dead things are not dreadful. They are totally indifferent. Most of you are indifferent; if only you were dreadful.”[\[33\]](#)

Occasionally, Rosenstock-Huessy unleashed his diatribe on the individual student.[\[34\]](#) Sometimes, he spoke as if his problems were special to Dartmouth. One day he told his Dartmouth students that the most recent Dartmouth catalogue had abolished the academic institution and now it was only for skiing and football.[\[35\]](#) Mostly though he tried to rouse his students from the cowardice and indifference he thought was systemic in U.S. higher education and symptomatic of the underlying

weakness of American life. Rosenstock-Huessy thought schools needed to establish privileged and protected times and places where the magic of an older generation inspiring a younger generations could occur. He believed that the classroom no longer served as a place for taking one's social orientation but was just one site among many-- playgrounds, tearooms, athletic fields, offices-- through which one rotated in succession; and nothing serious ever occurred there. [36]

Seriousness and the Mercenary

1

It was one of Rosenstock-Huessy's periodic themes that young people needed discipline so that they could be free from arbitrary constraints as adults. [37] He was especially frustrated that colleges are places people go to play with ideas without any of the seriousness of struggle and resistance real ideas engender for people who must form their lives around the commitments implicit in certain really decisive conceptions. [38] He found the whole notion that one would "play with ideas" to be effete, and effete not in some vaguely pejorative way but literally: people who play with ideas produce nothing. Near the end of that same "Cross of Reality" course he told his students that one certainly could not speak of anything so serious as religion in our colleges which are "... the playground for empty brains and lazy hearts." [39]

Part of the problem was the lazy relativism practiced in American colleges and universities.

I'm very serious about this. We have-- over the last 20 years, the American colleges have destroyed their right of existing-- existence. If you want to hear a very distinguished American speak about-- his mind about this, read Samuel Eliot Morison's-- the great historian's of Harvard-- address in Kingston, Can-- Canada where he speaks out against that trash which today is called "truth" in our-- your education. It's-- just appeared. I'd advise you very much to read it. "Freedom and the-- and Higher Education" it is called. Samuel Eliot Morison. Things are in very bad shape, gentlemen. The sore spot in American [is] you. Your education. Not yourself. You are very innocent people, gentlemen. But what you-- you do not contribute to the truth, ... you... only contribute to-- to the opinion. For this we don't need colleges, gentlemen. Opinions form in every city, anyway, you see. Opinion is that which is the-- the gist of-- of daily life, the routines of life. If you only repeat these routines yourself, if you do not obstruct them, if you do not appraise them, if you do not outgrow them, then why should there be a college? Why-- why should you have just the same life in an easier way of the plumber and the man at the filling station, you see? You must oppose their opinions to find out the truth. That's at least the idea of the liberal arts college as it was founded by Parmenides. [40]

1

Rosenstock-Huessy was himself a kind of relativist; and his position should not be broadly conflated with the yelp about relativism from contemporary conservatives. His position is nuanced. In his view relativism is a given against which we build our accounts of what we do and do not know. But here with Morison he accurately identified the production of "opinion"-- untested, unqualified,

uncriticized-- as the single greatest detriment to the moral legitimacy of the university in our times. If all we produce in the human sciences is opinions, then it really is fair for the public to ask what is the difference between our work and that of a daytime talk show. Rosenstock-Huessy had great sympathy in the middle-1950s for the man and woman in the street who identified with Senator Joseph McCarthy in his attacks on the intellectuals in higher education. He believed McCarthy was wrong but understood how the “detached” position of the academic was an affront in a world that would only seem to thrive on “attachment.”[\[41\]](#)

Rosenstock-Huessy was especially alarmed that the conditions of death, indifference, and detachment, were being reproduced in higher education. He returned from an American Philosophical Association meeting disturbed that it was a sort of academic “slave market.”[\[42\]](#) Everywhere in the U.S. he encountered indifference, he met with the mercenary intellect. Rosenstock-Huessy scored academics who would only tell those truths which would please their advisors, get them their Ph.D.s, and serve their careers.[\[43\]](#) He told of one of the best history students they had had at Dartmouth going to graduate school at Harvard. This young man had joined with a group of other promising young scholars for the purpose of getting a huge grant from the Ford Foundation. Only first, they had to figure out what the Ford Foundation wanted studied.[\[44\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy was livid. He often said that science was mediocre in the U.S. because Americans erroneously believed you could buy inspiration with cash. Once he argued with Walter A. Jessup, of Jessup Hall fame at the University of Iowa, about this problem.[\[45\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy believed the worship of the grant led to the brainless pursuit of the fad of the year in both academic and public life.[\[46\]](#) The undergraduates either brought these mercenary attitudes and practices with them to college or developed them in residence. Rosenstock-Huessy considered it deplorable that a young man from Chicago thought his Harvard degree was a pretty good marketing tool in his hometown,[\[47\]](#) and execrated all those in America who changed their minds for the outrageous reason of getting a job or a promotion.[\[48\]](#)

1

His concern was not just the corruption of *lupeto* or the triumph of the cash-value god Moloch. Rosenstock-Huessy believed that the mercenary mind was hopelessly *innocent* and incapable of taking responsibility.

Under the shades of the suburb’s sidewalks, my words don’t matter much. As long as my words made law in my work, the interlacing of my thoughts, words, and acts decided over their being either good or evil. But nowadays, an advertising agency makes the young writer proclaim the latest hair tonic an eighth world wonder; why hold this against him? These words are not his own....

Sin has become collective. The same doctor or manufacturer or mechanic or teacher who is so tame and good and overwrought that he has neither time nor opportunity to sin, belongs to one or more sinning groups. He belongs to a professional group, block, and lobby. They sin for him. And at home, he and his wife fall victim to all the drives in the community.[\[49\]](#)

It was this perpetual childishness and consequent displacement of responsibility onto dimly understood institutions that gave Rosenstock-Huessy his grave concerns. On a few occasions he went so far as to criticize modern nursing as a mercenary profession occupied by many people who did not understand that “nurse” is a great office that changes its holder toward seriousness.[50] Perhaps this is not a convincing example, but it illustrates his sense that this problem had crept into every facet of our lives.

1

Rosenstock-Huessy found the evidence for these tendencies everywhere he looked. He came upon a consulting firm proudly teaching double-talk, equivocation, and evasion.[51] When he was working on an encyclopedia he found that entire subject matters, such as abortion, had to be omitted for fear of offending potential Catholic readers.[52] He looked askance at his colleagues in the Tuck Business School who argued one could sell anything to anyone, and he was very concerned about the critical vacancy that came with the obviously absurd proposition that the customer is always right. He thought it a degradation that a student had a story returned by a professor marked not “A” or “Excellent” but “Saleable.”[53] He loathed the “bastards” at IBM and found the U.S. to be the most insincere nation in its politics he had ever known.[54] He found us to be a nation of utterly uninspired hypocrites and held that for all real purposes there is no political discourse in America because everything is falsified here.[55]

The problem is not that we are not intelligent enough. We produce an endless supply of “brainy popinjays,” often possessing a *useful* level of detachment and an *admirable* degree of specialist expertise, but these bright operatives also divert people with their “Niagara of disconnected facts” and their “pandemonium of propaganda.”[56] Realize, with Rosenstock-Huessy’s strong sense of the necessity of maintaining plural ways of understanding the world, plural ways of speaking our world into existence-- objectively, subjectively, prejectively, trajectively-- he certainly did not mean to damn science or academics or experts or even in a qualified sense, “sophists.” He certainly *did* want these people to stop getting a free pass on criticism and an undeserved elevation as the models of upstanding modern citizenship. He thought too much was at stake to continue to call mediocrity “excellence” and cowardice “expected.”

1

Writing in the incredible passion of the closing days of the Second World War, Rosenstock-Huessy did not want us to become a nation of “job hunters,” glorified migrant workers, new carpetbaggers.[57] The phrases were prescient. In some ways we *have* become sorry job hunters and carpet baggers. This is what Rosenstock-Huessy saw falling into place in the chummy little corporate-suburban realities he saw his students bringing to Dartmouth/taking from Dartmouth in fortified form. Rosenstock-Huessy returned many times in his lectures to the Latin phrase, *corruptio optimi pessima*--

the corruption of the best is the worst corruption.[58] Perhaps the phrase is inherently elitist: Rosenstock-Huessy meant it as a challenge to our colleges, churches, public institutions, and to our “brainy popinjays” wherever they might show up in our classrooms and communities. He ruminated with his students in “Universal History” on May Day in 1956, that if we worshiped the suburb and the corporation, accessible as these things are for the reasonably talented and well socialized students who seek them, what is there left for which to pray? He suggested they pray that they do *not* get that job.[59]

Gaining Time

1

In the final analysis, the problems Rosenstock-Huessy thought he was addressing were planetary and supra-organismic and not just personal or national. Following Humboldt, he held that the cosmos was working through certain of its creative possibilities in human life. He held that the purpose of humanity is to preserve those achievements while being open to the inspiration that leads to progress. Rosenstock-Huessy was a historian and well understood that this progress was not easy, automatic, or unambiguous: built into the human condition are the motivations for dishonesty, mistrust, violence, arrogance, and ennui. But the point was to build the social structures-- over and over and over again-- that counter-acted these forces. Doing so created time and times in which people could dwell in peace and undertake many projects. Rosenstock-Huessy told his students that the problem of humankind is to *gain* time; but to really grasp, to comprehend, why he lacerated his students and American life so, he believed that the U.S. and Europe had *lost* time since 1890, and did not seem to know how to get it back. [60] For Rosenstock-Huessy this forfeit was not just about some few people’s happiness or the well being of a nation but involved the loss of the defining human capacity and the foreclosure of the human destiny.

So Rosenstock-Huessy’s diatribe against his students was extensive and relentless. He told them that no truth was ever spoken among themselves.[61] He said he had been condemned to live in a “nest of lies.”[62] He told them he did not care what they thought of him; the only thing that mattered was that he feared God.[63] One day he told a class, “To have to teach you in this college is just as much a punishment as to lie in the grave.”[64] And on returning papers to “Universal History” in 1956 he told his students that they had insulted his life’s research as mere opinion, ignored all he had struggled to teach them, that his influence was nought, “... I’m just dead.”[65]

After Dartmouth, Rosenstock-Huessy tried to teach again at UCLA where he obviously hoped his status as a special guest and wise old sage would carry some weight with a new group of students. He came to the end of his course “Historiography” with a familiar conclusion.

...not one of you has read over his manuscript, his typewritten manuscript and corrected the misprints. I’ve never seen such a treatment. This is just-- I mean, a pig wouldn’t be treated this way. And I can prove it, because not one has any emendation on his

typewritten errors. There is not-- never a pencil or a-- even bit of ink on any one of your papers, where you have been good enough to correct your own nonsense. Why should I read such stuff? It's really-- it took me quite-- I was very reluctant not to throw these papers into your faces. I'm not your wet-nurse. And you are so-- you have never grown up beyond the age of 2. You go to the toilet --you are not toilet broken. That's how I call this. This is what you are. I-- I really had to-- to use very much restraint to read these papers.

1

And the second thing: --do you think I'm stupid that I do not see that you copy literatim from another text? I've even mentioned it. It's despicable. You just have copied pages and pages from printed books. Do you think I'm such-- such an idiot? Num-- that's Number 2. What shall I do with you? I don't care. My-- I'm an old man, and I thought it was a privilege for you, that I-- well, that you could hear these things. You haven't treated me this way. You have made me understand that I'm just a fool.[\[66\]](#)

This is heartbreaking reading. All of us who teach can be sympathetic to Rosenstock-Huessy, from our grief over spelling and punctuation to our greater ambitions to spark independent thinking, motivate surpassing inquiry, and earn the trust to share our most demanding / revealing conceptions. Of course he *was* a fool not to appreciate how ill equipped students were to deal with his counter-cultural ideas, intense style, and improbable demands. But he was a fool in a more profound sense too. Rosenstock-Huessy was foolish to believe optimistically, as all good teachers do, in the essential pliability of the human being toward richer possibilities carried out with greater appropriateness. In this regard, though he ranted and blustered to his students about the way their lives were symptomatic of a moribund culture, he did so because he saw those same lives as the sign of the ever renewing potential for decisive action, life changing commitment, and courageous innovation in a speaking community, over against the ever present threats of decadence, revolution, anarchy, and war. In Rosenstock-Huessy's thinking the classroom was the crucible in which these possibilities are compounded.

Which Brings Us Back to Our Predicament

It is safe to say that no reader of this paper, no member of our communication associations, makes such a drastic critique and accusation against her students. But if our students are not just empty vessels for our teaching, what are they? Do we do our students any favor when we behave as if they are innocent of their society and times and morally neutral except as they cheat in school or commit famous crimes? We need to deeply engage these questions as we consider the evidence that an attacking pedagogy inspires some students as it appears ridiculous to others.

1

Notes

[1] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "In Defense of the Grammatical Method," *Speech and Reality* (Norwich: Argo, 1970) 21.

[2] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Individual's Right to Speak," *Speech and Reality* 178.

[3] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "How Language Establishes Relations," *Speech and Reality* 120.

[4] Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Individual's Right to Speak," *Speech and Reality* 185.

[5] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Origin of Speech* (Norwich: Argo, 1981) 45.

[6] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Four Phases of Speech," *I Am an Impure Thinker* (Norwich: Argo, 1970) 55.

[7] Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Four Phases of Speech," *I Am an Impure Thinker* 60.

[8] Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Four Phases of Speech," *I Am an Impure Thinker* 62.

[9] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Teaching Too Late, Learning Too Early," *I Am an Impure Thinker* 95.

[10] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 23, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1990) 14.

- [11] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* (1946: New York, Harper, 1966) 229.
- [12] Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* 229.
- [13] Rosenstock-Huessy, "How Language Establishes Relations," *Speech and Reality* 178.
- [14] ¹⁴Rosenstock-Huessy, "In Defense of the Grammatical Method," *Speech and Reality* 25.
- [15] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Articulated Speech," *Speech and Reality* 47.
- [16] Rosenstock-Huessy, "The Individual's Right to Speak," *Speech and Reality* 163.
- [17] Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Origin of Speech* 110.
- [18] Rosenstock-Huessy, "Articulated Speech," *Speech and Reality* 64.
- [19] Rosenstock-Huessy, "In Defense of the Grammatical Method," *Speech and Reality* 16.
- [20] Consider a few representative passages in this tradition. On *z_on logon ekhon* read Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1178a6 in *The Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953); for a similar view among the ancient Greeks consider Isocrates, "Antidosis," *Isocrates II*, trans. George Norlin (London: Heinemann, 1929) 293 and Isocrates, "Nicocles or the Cyprians," *Isocrates I*, trans. George Norlin (London: Heinemann, 1928) 81-82. Of speech and language, humans and animals see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology, Part One With Selections*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publisher, 1970) 51; Lewis Mumford, "Animal Into Human," *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-1972* (New York: Harcourt, 1979) 412; Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, 1940) 131; Kenneth Burke, "Definition of Man," *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U California P, 1966) 3-5; Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Free P, 1971) 20; Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, 1975) 17, 29-45;

Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1962) 70; Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942; Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1957) 103-08. Speech and language as decisive in philosophical anthropology is evident in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1989) 412-13, 450, 501; Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (1913; Princeton: Princeton U P, 1972) 29; Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (1962; Cambridge: MIT P, 1986) 256; Martin Buber, "What is Man?" *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (1938; Boston: Beacon P, 1955) 203; José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Norton, 1963) 203; John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free P, 1916) 3-4; Ernst Cassirer, *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (1929; New Haven: Yale U P, 1957) 15; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966; New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1967) 22, 26, 34-41; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1977) 21.

[21] Hortatorical uses of the "speaking being" are numerous, but good examples are in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1958) 1-28 ff.; Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1974) 112 ff.; William Sullivan, *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* (Berkeley: U California P, 1982). An explicit ethics derived from the requirements of communication, particularly as articulated by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas is debated in Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmayr, eds. *The Communication Ethics Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1990).

[22] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 9, "Universal History-- 1956," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1988) 7.

[23] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 9, "Universal History-- 1956," 12-13.

[24] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 9, "Universal History-- 1956," 14.

[25] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 12, "Comparative Religion-- 1954," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1988) 1.

[26] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 18, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," (N.p.: Hans R.

Huessy, 1990) 16-17; also lecture 17, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 10.

[27] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 21, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 4.

[28] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 10, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 17.

[29] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 6, "Universal History-- 1954," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1988) 19.

[30] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 4, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 7.

[31] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 3, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 8.

[32] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 22, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1990) 9.

[33] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 23, "Greek Philosophy--1956," 23.

[34] "Sir, if you want to bargain, go to Macy's": Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 5, "Universal History-- 1956," 2; "One of you performs the-- a remarkable feat: he derives the Jews from Cain ... How-- anybody can offer me a paper-- with-- with such a sentence, I mean": Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 13, "Historiography-- 1959," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1991) 2. Of course, Rosenstock-Huessy himself had uttered the offending sentence, verbatim, in the very first lecture in the course, thereby proving again his assertion that students are bound by academic authority. See Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 1, "Historiography-- 1959," 39.

[35] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 24, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1990) 20-21. Taking the onus off of Dartmouth, see a colloquy with a student in Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 22, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 12-13.

[36] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 1, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 6.

- [37] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Circulation of Thought-- 1956," 3-4, 6-7.
- [38] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 14, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 25.
- [39] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 24, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 1.
- [40] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 9, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 20.
- [41] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 15, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 22-23.
- [42] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 21, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 7.
- [43] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 5, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 11.
- [44] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 3, "Circulation of Thought-- 1954," (N.p.: Hans R. Huessy, 1988) 15.
- [45] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* (1946; New York: Harper, 1966) 32.
- [46] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 1, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956"; lecture 7, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 16.
- [47] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 13, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 15.
- [48] Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 7, "Cross of Reality-- 1953," 2. Also see lecture 1, "Circulation of Thought-- 1954," 28.
- [49] Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* 30-31.
- [50] For example, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Circulation of Thought-- 1956," 23.

[51] Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 1, "St. Augustine By the Sea-- 1962," (N.p.: Hans R. Huussy, 1990) 1-2.

[52] Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 11, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 5.

[53] Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 2, "Hinge of Generations-- 1953," (N.p.: Hans R. Huussy, 1990) 3.

[54] Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 25, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 6.

[55] Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 4, "Circulation of Thought-- 1954," 20; lecture 7, "Universal History-- 1956," 7.

[56] Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Planetary Service: A Way Into the Third Millennium*, trans. Mark Huussy and Freya von Moltke (1965; Norwich: Argo, 1978) 13, 78; lecture 10, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 15; *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* 5; "In Defense of the Grammatical Method," *Speech and Reality* (Norwich: Argo, 1970) 41; also *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (1938; Norwich: Argo, 1969) 28, 30.

[57] Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* 198, 213, 241; lecture 7, "Hinge of Generations-- 1953," 14.

[58] For example Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 2, "Comparative Religion-- 1954," 2-3.

[59] Rosenstock-Huussy, lecture 5, "Universal History-- 1956," 13.

[60] Rosenstock-Huussy, *Out of Revolution* 14; lecture 3, "Universal History-- 1954," 7; "Circulation of Thought-- 1956," 18; lecture 5, "Comparative Religion-- 1954," 27; also see lecture 5, "Universal History-- 1954," 6.

[61]

Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 24, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 5.

[\[62\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 22, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 11.

[\[63\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 23, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 21-22.

[\[64\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 7, "Hinge of Generations-- 1953," 12.

[\[65\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 6, "Universal History-- 1956," 2.

[\[66\]](#) Rosenstock-Huessy, lecture 13, "Historiography-- 1959," 1. To understand his sense of what it meant to be an emeritus professor see lecture 22, "Greek Philosophy-- 1956," 4-5.