

NOTES ON SELECTED ESSAYS OF ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY

Introduction

7-00 Feringer notes

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Apology

This volume contains detailed notes on forty essays of Rosenstock-Huessy, including his lecture transcripts, books, and unpublished works. Although these works represent only a fraction of the, over six hundred listings in the Complete Bibliography of his writings, as compiled by Lise van der Molen, I believe they represent the major outlines of his new method for social analysis, which he called *The Grammatical Method*. These notes are intended to serve as an introduction to his thought, not as a substitute for reading the original manuscripts from which they were taken.

Such extensive notes for the works of a writer are uncommon, but in this case should not be perceived as a casual intellectual effort. One might well ask, "Why would one bother to shoulder such a considerable effort?" There are two reasons. When I was first introduced to Rosenstock-Huessy's thought I was living under the dark cloud of an intellectual quandary. That is to say, I was trying to understand my own experience in the context of a world that seemed out of kilter. Listening to Rosenstock-Huessy's recordings was the beginning of an awakening. His words reflected remarkable insight into many significant questions in my own life about which I

had given much thought, but had yet little understanding. I was not long out of formal schooling. While the technical education I had received was adequate as vocational training, the increasing problems of society, - environmental destruction, war, poverty, institutions in every field no longer effective in carrying out their professional purpose, - seemed overwhelming to the point of predicting dark future for society. The prevailing blind faith in the primary methods for creating a healthy, viable society, science and "free enterprise," has proven to be a foundation of sand. Perhaps the most spiritually enervating notion I could not put out of my thoughts was that, what one might expect to be the guardian of social sensitivity, institutionalized religion had seemed to have lost sight of its purpose and therefore proven no more viable than any other institution.

Rollo May sums up best our present social malaise:

The old myths and symbols by which we orient ourselves are gone, anxiety is rampant; we cling to each other and try to persuade ourselves that what we feel is love; we do not will because we are afraid that if we choose one thing or one person we'll lose the other, and we are too insecure to take that chance. The bottom then drops out of the conjunctive emotions and processes---of which love and will are the two foremost examples. The individual is forced to turn inward, he becomes obsessed with the new form of the problems of identity, namely even-if-I-know-who-I-am, I-have-no-significance. I am unable to influence others. The next step is apathy. And the step following that is violence. For no human being can stand the perpetually numbing experience of his own powerlessness. [Love and Will, Delta, 1989 edition, pp. 13,14]

This foreboding sense of society, then, was the context into which I heard Rosenstock-Huessy's words. Although at first my understanding was superficial, intuition accurately foretold of the profundity he was speaking. Although many others had spoken out about these same problems, either no solutions were suggested, or when solutions were given they proved to be completely inadequate, - narrow and fragmented, or so theoretical as to have lost any connection with reality. Listening to Rosenstock-Huessy was vastly different, however, motivating further study of his work. What followed in subsequent years was the most enlightening, empowering intellectual journey of my life. I quickly came to perceive that Rosenstock-Huessy described a much grander canvas of human experience and its meaning and I came to experience the transformation that took hold of W.H. Auden, who said, "*Speaking for myself, I can only say that, by listening to Rosenstock-Huessy, I have been changed.*" Or, as Paul Tillich said to Phillip Chamberlin, "*Rosenstock-Huessy! When he speaks, it's like lightning.*"

These notes represent part of an extensive study requiring detailed note-taking. At this point I must emphasize that these are notes, in contrast to a more tightly organized flowing, and condensed essay which would be my personal interpretation. These notes were taken in preparation for that project. Notes are, by nature, somewhat cryptic, redundant and eliminating the rich and abundant examples in the original works.

The newcomer to Rosenstock-Huessy's thought will find other barriers to overcome along the way.

Difficulties in Reading Rosenstock-Huessy

Extracting the gold in Rosenstock-Huessy's essays requires work and careful thought, especially for the new reader. When I began this study I felt off-balance, overwhelmed with strikingly new ways of thinking about human experience. One constantly struggles for reference points to guide understanding of the texts. New thought, by definition, immediately forces one to find and learn those reference points. New ideas either call for new terminology, which abounds in Rosenstock-Huessy's writing, or re-defining of old terminology. In reading his essays, for instance, one experiences an education in the Latin and Greek origins of the English language.

Another difficulty of understanding Rosenstock-Huessy lies in needing to absorb the rich dose of intermingling of many significant issues at one time. We are traditionally prepared to deal with one issue at a time, clearly stated, with a modicum of sequential logic and flow of thought. But in his essays one is likely to be confronted with issues of speech, philosophy, religion, history, teaching, the nature of man, psychology, and sociology in various combinations. For instance, in this age of scientific thinking one tends to be shocked to run across constant religious references. As a result, one might be tempted to "write him off" as some kind of zealot whose writing of serious essays in social science seems out of place. Such an impression could hardly be more off the mark. When one considers this seemingly strange injection of subject matter, one should realize, as did I, that no knowledge has meaning or power until it is acted upon, at which time it affects society and therefore takes on moral implications. Traditionally, we are taught to study knowledge out of the context of use, which neither prepares us for application nor gives us all its meaning. Rosenstock-Huessy is not interested in intellectual gamesmanship; scholarship is only validated in use, he reminds us, by way of the consequences of its use. This assumption becomes a powerful force in sending one's thinking onto a new level, a level that harbors the potential to become powerful enough to transform the reader.

Rosenstock-Huessy wrote and spoke with an enormously powerful style, but this quality also harbors some difficulties in understanding and getting used to. George Morgan, in his incisive work, *SPEECH AND SOCIETY*: writes:

He struck me as a man of genius, full of striking insights, his language wonderfully alive. ...At the same time his language was more puzzling than that of anyone I had read, far more than Nietzsche's. Flashes of meaning would catch my eye, then disappear around the corner before I could focus on them. It was clear that he was not getting through to his readers as he should....He told me he suffered agonies from having too much to say. (p.ix,xi)

This is not an uncommon problem with all original thinkers, as I suggested above. But I have come to believe that his rhetorical style was as original as other elements of his thinking. His speech and writing weaves a rich tapestry, describing the human condition by way of

intertwining the two opposing languages of art and science. Art, whatever its form, has as its purpose portraying the emotional experience of an event. Science, on the other hand, describes the structure and analysis of the event. Metaphor is emotionally powerful, but somewhat vague in that one can take several meanings from a given word. Science seeks precision, on the other hand. Art attempts to achieve accuracy in gaining a feeling of living the idea and therefore needs an infinite variety of tones and color and a flow of events in time. Science attempts to achieve accuracy in describing space, where precision must be specific as possible. . The blending integrates at once the mind and the heart. We are certainly not taught to deal with this style, but there is a rich reward when one melds it into one's soul.

Here is one example from a translation of his SOZIOLOGIE, "In The Cross of Reality":

All "men" kill, because they must seize living things in order to live. And all men die. So nothing that happens could become history if there were no cure for death...The history of mankind is composed on one theme alone: how does love become stronger than death? The scores of this composition, in the histories, must be copied in as many editions as there are generations of men. For the composition is recomposed by those in every generation whose love overcomes a death or a murder.

What an intriguing way to begin an essay! At once emotionally and intellectually compelling, I take this essay, in sum, to develop the idea of how we mortals, afraid to die, seek to achieve a form of everlasting life, and in the process, a path in the course of everyday living, to "being alive." For instance, Socrates died physically twenty-five hundred years ago, but his spirit has come down through the ages and still invests us with its intellectual power today. The logic of the development of this essay I found compelling.

Rosenstock-Huessy dares, in this age of science, to introduce religion into the theme of eternal life. The message of Jesus was used as an example to show how normal mortals can be transformed by a spirit that lasts beyond our death. When I showed this, and a number of other passages to a poet friend, her response was, "This is not prose, it is poetry." Likewise, ERH's epic work OUT OF REVOLUTION begins, "Our passions give life to the world. Our collective passions constitute the history of mankind."

George Morgan goes on to say:

He often started a train of thought, then digressed to another, and may or may not have pursued the former in another paragraph, another chapter, or another book. He made unqualified statements that he qualified elsewhere. ... when I raised questions he was never at a loss for a prompt answer. (p.xi)

However enigmatic and powerful, the reader inevitably struggles in some essays a bit, essays which one would hope had been better organized. . So I admonish any reader who has not

already become captivated by the power of Rosenstock-Huessy's thought, to persist; the reward will be more than worth the effort. Some essays are beautifully organized, and some less so. But like anyone prospecting for gold, one may find the pure metal at one time, rich ore at another, and even less rich ore at still other times. In sum, I have found the ore as rich as it gets.

I found the best way to overcome these problems was to make detailed notes because my normal reading habits, geared as they were for the traditional logic of the essay style, were not adequate for picking up many of the subtleties crucial to understanding Rosenstock-Huessy's texts.

The Process of Note-Making

When taking these notes, I attempted to put Rosenstock-Huessy's ideas into my own words and make personal comments when it seemed necessary. After beginning this process I began showing some of the notes to others in an effort to get feedback. Each original essay was read at least three times; some required even more study. Each set of notes has been edited at least twice; most were revised in the process. Where possible I asked readers to read the original essay, then, compare it with the notes. One must be conscious of the fact that each of us is inevitably biased, but consciousness of that bias allows one to take this into consideration. My hope is that with these precautions the notes in this anthology are as creditable as possible. I am indebted to those who read the notes and made suggestions along the way.

The Grouping and Sequence of Titles

Any form of categorizing represents a point of view - assumptions about reality whether this is done either consciously or unconsciously. The order I suggest here is no different. After two decades of concentrated study of Rosenstock-Huessy's essays, a unifying framework began to piece together in my mind which seems to be confirmed with each new reading. I believe that keeping the following points in mind might help the reader formulate his/her own sense of the elegance and comprehensiveness of this *Grammatical Method*. Keeping this "world view" in mind helped me put difficult-to-understand and seemingly isolated topics into a single context, thereby aiding in my overall comprehension. Actually the individual essays took on additional meaning.

Another tool to understanding I found confirming was to overlay the statement inherent in each essay onto my own life experience and interpret how validly it seemed to fit. I found both of these techniques useful to interpreting his writing.

I suggest the following assumptions to keep in mind as a starting point for the reader:

1. The *Grammatical Method* addresses our ever-present problem of understanding our experience. As such, it subsumes all disciplines, scientific and artistic, into a new method for interpreting the meaning of social experience. It is not a new natural science, or theology, but integrates both, and as with all integrating theories functions at the next higher level.. It builds

on traditional knowledge, but by adding a new dimension (the study of knowledge in the context of use) it changes the meaning of these disciplines and adds power to them in the course of proposing a new science of society.

2. All thought and action is given meaning only in the consequence of use. This means that society cannot be judged without an idea of what a viable, regenerating society might be. I believe, then, that the constant question in Rosenstock-Huessy's mind has been, "How do we create a viable community, one that engenders human survival and growth?" The litmus for evaluation of any community is the degree to which it is at peace with itself. Only thus can humans grow and evolve to their optimal potential. War and other social diseases that would end human society as we know it demand our attention, thereby arresting, for the particular moment in history, our progress toward improvements in society. The ever-present threat to society is that these social diseases will ultimately cause death when unattended. Thus, the unifying principle that integrates these essays is how each fits into social struggles for survival and movement toward the goal of peace.

3. Human beings are everlastingly unfinished. As we grow, we comprehend a greater reality and thereby alter our goals; ideals and the interpretation of past experience (history) must therefore undergo constant revision. The ebb and flow of movements in history is, however, filled with both progress and retrogression. Any great change can mean a leap forward or slide backward. Nazism and civil wars in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Cambodia in recent history have testified to a reversion to savagely primitive forms of behavior. Because political and social environments change, no particular solution lasts more than a generation. The great problem of every age is to figure out what new responses are called for. In short, how must society recreate itself to remain viable? To follow the old ways no longer viable is to decline, inevitably. The very nature of humanness is that we are beings capable of change.

The seven categories into which I group Rosenstock-Huessy's work are arbitrary, of course. As I continue to study Rosenstock-Huessy, I will no doubt decide on revisions that make more sense to me, as I have in the past. This is merely the latest generation of ideas; however, I am firm in my conclusion as to the unifying concept, i.e., the regenerating community. There are many other issues he examines in detail such as love, time, art, religion, space, etc. However, these themes are ubiquitous throughout. George Morgan has already written an excellent book, *Speech and Society*, which summarizes Rosenstock-Huessy's several definitions of these other themes.

No particular meaning should be imposed as to the sequence of categories, except what seems to flow logically for the understanding of topics. Religion is not more important than science, teaching, or history. Within each category the essays are listed chronologically.

1. Reality

What are the fundamental worlds of reality that human beings experience? The *Cross of Reality* symbolizes the structure he found that would reveal the qualities of conscious experience. We live in three worlds of time (past, present, and future) and two worlds of space (thought and the physical world). The key to opening these worlds lies through speech, which can only be created in community. Therefore, we cannot conceive of ourselves only as individual as it is not possible for us to become human without community. We must think of ourselves in terms of four different social roles - as "ourselves singularly," as a partner in intimate relationships, as a member of a working team, and as a member of a community. At any given moment one must make a decision as to which of these four roles is to be the dominant one for an appropriate response. But decision-making, with the accompanying change it may imply, is no simple event. These processes require an inner power to overcome the seemingly overwhelming forces marshalled against change. To see more of reality is to be capable of seeing the world anew each day. Powering renewal is "the practical function of our soul. "

As a result of speaking with Rosenstock-Huessy and reading his essays, I have constantly marvelled at how much he learned from his experience and at his power to see and understand a scope of reality vastly beyond my own. The root of this power is described, I believe, by his *Grammatical Method*, particularly in the following works:

- a. The Multiformity of Man - 1948**
- b. Cross of Reality - 1953**
- c. Grammatical Method - 1962**
- d. Cross of Reality - 1965**
- e. Economy of Times - 1965**
- f. Speech and Reality - published 1970**
- g. Practical Knowledge of the Soul - published 1988**

2. Speech, Language, and the Circulation of Thought

Speech is another fundamental, leading to the creative ability to become conscious of a reality far above the animal state in which we are born. It is the gateway, the "open sesame" leading to our consciousness of our inner reality of thought. Through our ability to communicate we become capable of naming and, thereby, re-creating the concrete world in a new world of consciousness. In the process we become capable of learning from our own experience, from others, and from the experience of past cultures. Such consciousness is essential in the creation of a future. Quite literally, naming "creates the reality" of both the inner and outer (concrete) worlds in which we live. Because speech creates our consciousness of these worlds, its patterns

reflect the vitality of any community at a given point in time. Studying how speech is used, or not used, then identifies social break-downs, thereby identifying cures. The following works address this issue:

- a. Circulation of Thought - 1949**
- b. Circulation of Thought - 1954**
- c. Circulation of Thought - 1956**
- d. St. Augustine by the Sea - 1962**
- e. Lingo of Linguistics 1966**
- f. The Origin of Speech - 1981**

3. History

If one were to awaken each morning with amnesia one would be dysfunctional until an accumulation of experience offered reference points for judging the meaning of events. The temptation of human nature is to live in the present only, because thinking in terms of the long range, of creating one's future imposes discipline on behavior in the present. History is the memory we possess of a culture and ultimately of all humankind. The ability to make judgments about the meaning of the present and plan for the future of any individual or culture is in direct proportion to length of their historical memory. The value of historical knowledge is, of course, never complete because new experience and new insights must alter our interpretation of past events. This is not to say that the events themselves are altered, but our interpretation of their meaning is changed, the cause and effects, especially long range effects are the source of new knowledge crucial to survival. It represents the case-study, so to speak, of human experience - the scope of what we have been capable of as well as patterns of lessons to be learned. When one sees the similarity of cultures throughout time one is hard-pressed not to believe that "humankind is one" and conclude that the histories of all cultures are universal. All cultures are telling different elements of the same story. Questions arising today that effect our future, put to history, offers a record of what types of problems persist, which type are ephemeral - and all of this becomes a beginning point for solving present problems in a way that moves us toward a more desired future. Time then is a key to understanding social experience and it must be understood as a single fabric. Essays by Rosenstock-Huessy on history are the following:

- a. Universal History - 1949**
- b. Universal History - 1951**
- c. Hinge of Generations - 1953**

- d. Universal History - 1954**
- e. History Must be Told - 1955**
- f. Universal History - 1956**
- g. Universal History - 1967**
- h. Cruciform Character of History - 1967**

4. Teaching

Teaching, Rosenstock-Huessy asserts, necessarily lies at the heart of any science of society. If humankind cannot inspire the next generation to carry on the movement toward peace, toward maintaining the hard-won success from the past (such as justice, equality, the rule of law, of how to be creative), we are certainly doomed. If the next generation is not taught how to battle against the constant debilitation of the ever-present causes of social diseases (war, revolution, anarchy, and degeneration), that generation declines toward the level of other animals whose ability to grow dies with each generation. And when this occurs, social life always begins again with the laws of the jungle. Man must therefore teach these lessons! The following works address Rosenstock-Huessy's ideas on teaching:

- a. Andragogy - 1925**
- b. In the Cross of Reality - 1927**
- c. Man Must Teach - about 1940**
- d. Potential Teachers - 1952**
- e. The Liberal Arts College - 1960**
- f. Karl Marx to the Peace Corps - 1966**
- g. Peace Corps - 1966**
- h. The University - 1968**
- i. Teaching Too Late, Learning Too Early - 1940**
- j. In the Cross of Reality**

5. Religion

Creating the wonders of community life out of raw experience is unavoidably purchased at the price of wrenching sacrifice, but willingness to sacrifice presents an enormous challenge to common human weakness. Powerful instincts push us in the direction of avoidance of pain, of the ambiguities of risk, which opposes a need to gain control of our lives. Instincts drive us toward thinking of the present only. Evolving beyond our animal nature disciplines us to build a future. Usually the "easy" way to respond has no value for building a future. Ultimate power must be employed to overcome these daunting barriers; this power is named "religion" by Rosenstock-Huessy. Finding the social truth is what is divine - taking generations. Speaking the truth can, and often does, put our personal welfare at risk even to the point of being life-threatening. "God is the power that makes us speak the truth" is one of Rosenstock-Huessy's trenchant definitions. The degree to which truth is sought, spoken, and acted on is a primary litmus of the viability of any community. A MAJOR QUESTION IS, "WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THIS POWER AND HOW MIGHT IT BE ACQUIRED?" This power cannot be defined or proven by logic, it can only be experienced. Institutions are a physical manifestation of religion, but attending church is its least important dimension. Rosenstock-Huessy defines one type of religious act as speaking the truth in a difficult situation regardless of any negative consequences it may bear for the speaker. These are a few of his important essays on this subject:

a. **The Christian Future or The Modern Mind Outrun - 1946**

a. **Comparative Religion - 1954**

b. **Four Disangelists - 1954 - Before and After Marx**

c. **Talks with Franciscans - 1965**

d. **Fashions of Atheism - 1968**

6. Philosophy

The distinction between philosophy (systems of thought defined as logical deductions from a set of assumptions) and religion must be clarified, because they are often mistaken for each other. The difference is that between the heart and the mind. Philosophy is an intellectual endeavor, and, of course, the intellect can be one type of guide for behavior. However, such religions are narrow and therefore confining. Science is the popular religion of our day in industrial societies, but the character of true religion, as defined above, is universal and not systematic. Theology does qualify as a philosophy. Both theology and philosophy are defined by doctrine and logic, following from the assumptions made by each denomination. Organized thought in the form of philosophy has been the valuable invention of the Greeks, certainly a

major contribution to civilization. There are, as we know, many philosophies representative of how different civilizations and groups within have organized their views of reality. Some are productive, some not, some narrow, some broad. Many exist side-by-side within cultures. One might call them minor gods. Our social problem, then, is to find the tolerance point between those systems, by which order can be maintained and peace may reside. But none of these should be mistaken for religion. Two important essays on philosophy are:

- a. **Philosophy and the Social Sciences - 1940**
- b. **Greek Philosophy - 1956**

7. *Social Applications*

Finally, Rosenstock-Huessy has written a number of essays on different social situations. I have simply assembled these into a single group which I call "social applications.."

- a. **Make Bold to be Ashamed - 1953**
- b. **What Future the Professions - 1960**
- c. **Planetary Service - 1978**

IN SUM

Aside from the methodology for discerning a clearer picture of reality (the GRAMMATICAL METHOD), the seven categories represent the major themes that I find compelling, forming the foundation for creating community. The many other themes he raises such as love, marriage, good and evil, hope, faith and incarnation, are common in many of the essays and constantly integrated into new concepts relating to the major themes. I believe that if the reader understands Rosenstock-Huessy's thought on these seven categories he/she will possess the best foundation for understanding the basic concepts for a better, more full understanding as to the meaning of our social experience and therefore the significant decisions we make in our lives, and the consequences thereof which inevitably leads one to a more full life. I believe this is the effect he has had on me.

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