

## NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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### Philosophical Sociology

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The number of contemporary philosophers who have kept their philosophic interests free from what Husserl calls concern with the human life-world is becoming smaller and smaller. As John Wild has recently reported in the *Philosophical Review* (LXVII [Oct., 1958], 460-76), the living thinkers of Continental Western Europe are almost all concerned with man in his concrete, full *Lebenswelt*. They have progressed beyond a critique of the limitations of abstraction and are seriously engaged in making up for these limitations as far as possible. In the English-speaking world, firsthand concern with the human life-world is less marked, both among logical positivists and among their more strenuous adversaries; but interest in the subject at secondhand is growing by leaps and bounds as reports from the Continent pour in.

Western philosophy is thus acquiring a range and freedom of movement somewhat like that which it had in the past before the explosive developments of thought from the seventeenth century to the present blew apart the old field of "natural philosophy" into reciprocally intolerant areas. However, the new range and freedom of movement is unlike the old in being concentrated on man, frequently on the human person as such rather than on a world of mere objects, or even on man as an object.

The world of Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy belongs to this line of philosophical development; and, with the appearance of the second and concluding volume of his *Soziologie*, the massive book *Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*,<sup>1</sup> it becomes manifest that his entire life's work merits more attention than it has so far received. Such attention is now encouraged by the appearance also of a collection of his articles and addresses over the last eight years, *Das Geheimnis der Universität*, with a subtitle advertising that these were directed "against the decay of the time-sense and of the power of speech."<sup>2</sup> This volume contains

<sup>1</sup>Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958 (774 pp.). Volume I, *Die Übermacht der Räume* (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer), had appeared in 1956 (335 pp.).

<sup>2</sup>*Das Geheimnis der Universität: wider den Verfall von Zeitsinn und Sprachkraft. Aufsätze und Reden aus den Jahren 1950 bis 1957* herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Georg Müller, mit einem Beitrag von Kurt Ballerstedt: "Leben und Werk Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy" (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958), 320 pp.

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a brief life of Rosenstock-Huessy and a bibliography of his writings, most of which are in German, though some are in English. Having taught law and sociology in his native Germany and theology at Harvard before he became, in 1935, Professor of Social Philosophy at Dartmouth College, where he is now emeritus, Rosenstock-Huessy has lived his life in the penumbra of phenomenological and "existentialist" developments. It would seem inaccurate to view his work as resulting from the "influence" of the standard phenomenological and personalist figures, Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers, Lavelle, Marcel, Denis de Rougemont, or even Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. He breathed the same air as these men, sensed many of the same questions; but one feels that he has made his own distinctive contributions to the climate of ideas.

These contributions are suggested in the title of his last two volumes, *Soziologie*. At one point, not far perhaps from the point at which it is tangent to psychoanalysis, phenomenological analysis opens into a sociology, since it finds the human person, for all his interiority, situated within society and thus sees the organization of society as the complement of the interior consciousness and interior resources of the individual. Here is the field in which Rosenstock-Huessy works, where his devotion to the unity of the social sciences (history included), theology, and language finds its outlet. His view of man and of reality is based on his profound awareness of psychological processes and of their historical grounding, and ultimately on his keen apprehension of the fact that all human concepts are formed within history, that in learning to form concepts every man is from infancy coached by the culture into which he is born. World views and philosophies are the coefficients of cultures and languages, not in the sense that we must despair of finding one which is true but in the sense that all concepts and insights and judgments, even when entirely true, involve some specialization; and the precise specialization which is resorted to in any one case is determined, at least in part, by a culture and a corresponding set of linguistic practices. The fact that these cultures can reach out to embrace one another saves us, of course, from the charge of facile "relativism." The specialized views can be made to interpenetrate—but not in abstraction. One cannot learn to form concepts without assimilating particular cultures. To know what "laboring man" means to an American, a Frenchman has in one way or another to learn to participate in the history of the United States; and to learn what *ouvrier* (applied to persons who are only somewhat the same as the American "laboring man") means to a Frenchman, an American must become in some sort a partaker of French history.

Although he follows phenomenological trends in reflecting on psycho-

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logical processes, Rosenstock-Huessy examines these processes not within the horizon of the individual self alone but through their development in social, linguistic, and conceptual history. Louis Lavelle has skillfully and patiently illuminated the effects of speech and writing in the individual life, assessing the psychological import of transactions conducted in one or the other medium. Rosenstock-Huessy is fully aware of the different psychological values of the media; but he is also interested in the historical, sociological causes for the emergence of writing, in the differences between an oral and a manuscript culture, and in the significance of the change from the one to the other in the forward-moving trajectory of history. This forward movement is an essential part of his vision; and it brings him to situate psychological phenomena themselves not merely in the individual self but in the real cosmos—which means, of course, the cosmos as influenced by Christianity, which has actually provided the vision of a cosmos in eschatological time; that is, in forward movement.

In the two volumes of *Soziologie* Rosenstock-Huessy produces a most unorthodox and philosophical treatment of this subject. First considering the significance of the emergence of sociology as a focus of human attention in this particular age of cosmic history, he goes on, more or less in the tradition of Continental sociology generally, to break down sociological phenomena in terms which demand philosophical handling. These are most often dialectical terms, dyads played against one another to generate meaning by contrast: sport and struggle, companionship and authority, art and love, children's speech and mother-tongues (what does "mother-tongue" say that "father-tongue" would not say?), disputation and philosophy, grammar and logic, and so on. Without discarding the results of "objective" sociological studies, this kind of treatment cuts back of such studies to their suppositions and the historical matrix in which they, too, have been formed.

One returns here from a world of "observation" and measurement to an older world of gnomic expressions and chthonic wisdom. Rosenstock-Huessy's "conclusions" tend to be of the nature of apothegms—not apothegms uttered in a vacuum but brought to bear on particular developments in culture and thought. A typical judgment from *Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, at a moment when he is touching on the thought of Friedrich Hölderlin and Père Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, s.j., is the following: "From this we draw the important conclusion: experiences of the first order, of the first rank, are not realized through the eye."<sup>3</sup> But if his is a kind of proverbial wisdom, it is a highly informed and sophisticated one—much more so than other such wisdoms in the past because it is generated out of,

<sup>3</sup>"Daraus ziehen wir den wichtigen Schluss: Erfahrungen ersten Grades, ersten Ranges, werden nicht durch das Auge gemacht" (*Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, p. 33).

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and brought to bear on, a mass of particular detail inaccessible to earlier ages. The detail gives gnomic pronouncement tremendous range. On the basis of an utterance such as the foregoing, it becomes possible to conduct a careful scrutiny of the entire modern enterprise of "framing" knowledge in visualist fashion, through charts and tables at one level, and at another through fixing attention on "objects" and even treating human beings as though they were objects (a necessary tactic, but one entailing definite disabilities). The titles of the two volumes of *Soziologie* have themselves a gnomic ring: *The Conquering Power of Space* and *The Full Count of the Ages* (this seems a more adequate rendering of the German than the more familiar English *The Fullness of Time*). As titles, however, they are perhaps a little contrived in that they suggest a compactness of organization which the leaping progression of thought in the volumes sometimes belies.

Rosenstock-Huessy's thought involves ultimately a kind of theology. Protestantism, he insists in a letter after the 1954 Evanston ecumenical meeting, did not make all the laity into priests, as some have thought, but simply into theologians. Even when one does not agree with his theological nuances or interpretations—and it is not too often that one does not—his thought is invariably seminal and its very movement stimulating. These volumes, like the other works of Rosenstock-Huessy, are difficult to classify. And this is as it should be, for a dissatisfaction with all classification because of the disability it unavoidably entails is a mark not only of Rosenstock-Huessy's thought but of contemporary philosophy generally. If it is true, as those who are intelligently ill at ease in the presence of classification well know, that we can never avoid it, however industriously we may conceal it, it is also true that man can never again be so smug about classifying things as he rather consistently has been in the past. Philosophy today is spilling out of its old containers, not shrinking but growing, developing a social dimension and cast which is personalist and even poetic and literary. Under these circumstances, it is hard to see how the practicing philosopher can fail to pay attention to Rosenstock-Huessy's work.