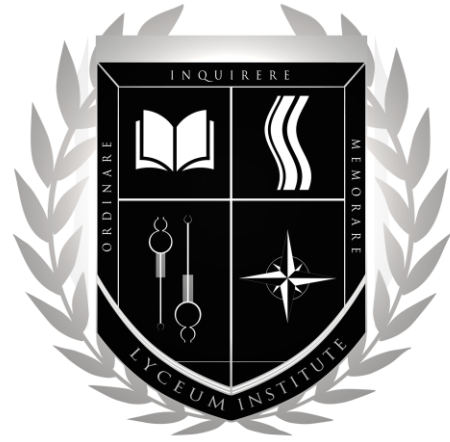


# AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE THOUGHT OF EUGEN ROSENSTOCK-HUESSY

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

Prof. Dr. Scott Randall Paine

FALL 2023



Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973)

## DESCRIPTION

One might ask what philosophical purpose there could be in studying a German Jewish convert to Christianity, and one who spent the early 20<sup>th</sup> century teaching the history of medieval jurisprudence, fought in the trenches for his country in the Great War, later emigrated from Nazi Germany to teach at Harvard, but was then pressured to leave that university because his classes were too interdisciplinary (long before it became fashionable), and also because he dared use the word “God” in his lectures. A more congenial home for his maverick talents was finally found at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire; there, until his death, he was allowed to continue to teach and write as he saw fit. In over 50 years of productivity, a vast and rather forbidding cornucopia of works poured forth, customarily ignored by academic departments of philosophy, theology and the social sciences. Although many will be overwhelmed as they survey the variety and

convolutions of his oeuvre, a number of highly qualified critics have lauded him as one of the most seminal thinkers of our time.

Philosophy has its array of methods, systems and outlines, but it is hard to fit Rosenstock-Huessy into any of them. Occasionally a thinker comes along who breaks the rules, but in the process helps us see things we simply had never seen before, or – as is typically the case in philosophy – to spot new dimensions of what we already knew, but did not know as well as we thought we did. We are reminded once again that our ideas are living realities – not just words on a page, or fixed patterns carved in stone – but that they truly live, and are often spawned in the most unexpected corners of our culture. Such ideas, together with their genealogy of presuppositions, their ever-expanding ambience of contexts, and their unexpected, and oft unsettling implications, will continue to sire new intellectual progeny in every age.

In the brave new world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even the greatest schools of ancient, medieval and modern thought will only succeed in maintaining their stature, to the extent that they are able to welcome these new perspectives, and allow themselves to be enriched, reminded and occasionally corrected. Good philosophers should always have the humility to be host to unfamiliar epiphanies, and to entertain answers to questions they perhaps have not yet learned to ask. The gadfly of Socrates is still very much alive, and just as bothersome as ever.

Rosenstock's insights have to do above all with speech, time and history – topics infamous for their unpredictability, and fractious in their irreducibility to mere ratiocination or univocal definition. Aristotle, after all, reminds us that, due to the very nature of human events, there will never be a science of history. And yet, with all the ambiguities and surprises, it is in time and history that we live and move and have our being. We use propositions and syllogisms, but they do not provide us with a human dwelling, nor can they console us in our trials.

Far from being the messianic age of enlightened tolerance and scientific consensus the 19<sup>th</sup> century had promised us, the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended up shaking our world to its foundations, becoming the most blood-soaked century on record. A few gifted thinkers who suffered through it all and lived to tell the story have generated a unique assortment of shell-shocked intuitions. Predictably, they can grow impatient with the staid habits of conventional academia. But there is wisdom to be gained from those who have suffered through these unprecedented traumas, enabled thereby to provide us with a kind of updated orientation we cannot gain from reading the works of earlier periods. Rosenstock-Huessy is among the foremost of these uncommon but timely sages.

I propose to cull from his works a number of texts containing some of his more enduring insights, well aware, however, that a brief course like this can offer no more than baby-steps in addressing the works of someone as prolific and as profound as Rosenstock. We will use these selections to discuss, for instance, what he means by the “grammatical method” of understanding, and how it serves as a safeguard against modern reductions of human reality to “scientific” and “indicative” statements. We will ask why he insists on the precedence of the second over the first person in our initial and formative encounter with reality, and why the prioritization of space over time has misguided modern understanding of the cosmos and our place within it.

We shall also take a close look at his proposed “Cross of Reality” – a simple but surprisingly powerful means of mapping our human reality onto a time and space that are truly human. We shall also ask if the origin of language – an issue still hotly debated in contemporary philosophy and social science – might lie more in formal than in informal speech, our everyday conversation being more a spin-off from ritual declamation and metrical poetry than an evolutionary ascent from

grunts and screeches. We shall ask why the ear and hearing should have an edge over the eye and seeing as foundation of our most basic approach to the world around us. We shall also evaluate his claim that listening is not just something we do in the presence of language – listening *to* it – but is rather an integral part of language itself.

It is inevitable in anyone who writes so much and for so long, however ingenious the balance of their contributions, that occasional shortcomings and missteps must also be identified. The seminar will not shy away from these. But even on the pages of his religious and theological speculations, where fellow-Christians might find room for criticism, one need only turn the page to find another paragraph that throws new and welcome light on old and familiar questions.

This German-American social philosopher – the chair offered him at Dartmouth was entitled “social philosophy” – is usually classed among the “speech thinkers” of the last century, with Martin Buber (1878-1965), Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and Ferdinand Ebner (1882-1931). We will discuss what this means in the larger framework of that century’s philosophical preoccupation with language. In particular, his understanding of history, fed by these readjustments of our sensibilities and mental dispositions, will be presented as perhaps the theme upon which most of his insights finally converge.

Whatever one’s previous philosophical or religious point of view, the writings of Rosenstock-Huessy offer a bracing intellectual tonic that can rejuvenate ideas that have grown weary and listless through over-exposure, revealing a world of contexts that have faded from the horizons of our over-specialized sciences. But it will also challenge some of our more constrictive habits of mind, inviting us to look anew at the whole of history, and the whole of the world. He bids us to do this with a realism that enables us to see what he calls the “multiformity of man,” all within a unity that embraces every tense, aspect, voice and mood of our attitudes, and every inflection of our identities and activities. It is hoped that the students of this seminar will graduate with a new pair of inner spectacles, enabling them to see not only new things, but more importantly, many things they have already seen before, but never really seen “for the first time.”

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Call it serendipity (I call it Providence), with no design on the part of the professor, nor of the institute, this seminar falls in the year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Rosenstock-Huessy in 1973.

## METHOD

The seminar is eight weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. The discussion session will be structured around a reading from Rosenstock-Huessy’s principle works and a few secondary commentators. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor.

## LECTURE

Each week there will be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also venture into related topics, perhaps using the reading as a launching point for addressing some tangential issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures

is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the readings, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions. There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

## DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 1:15-2:15pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week’s material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

## AUDITS OR COMPLETES

Beginning in 2022, all Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either *audit* the seminar or *complete* the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant **must** submit an essay of 2000+ words pertaining to the subject. This essay may be evaluated for publication in *Reality* and will be included in each Lyceum Institute member’s profile, along with the mark of auditing or completing.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

*(subject to additions and modifications)*

Sept 23	<p><b>1. The “Impure Thinker” that was Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERH. “Teaching Too Late – Learning Too Early,” from <i>I Am an Impure Thinker</i>, 91-114; Wayne Cristaudo et al. “Introduction: Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973)”, in <i>Culture, Theory and Critique</i>, 2015, vol. 56, 1 (12 pages).</li> <li>• [Secondary] Peter Leithart. “The Relevance of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy,” <i>First Things</i>, 06.28.07 (seven pages); Wayne Cristaudo. “Why Rosenstock-Huessy Matters: Personal reflections on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of his death,” unpubl., 2023 (29 pages).</li> </ul>
Sept 30	<p><b>2. Philosophy, Language and 20<sup>th</sup> Century “Speech-Thinkers”</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERS, “The Uni-Versity of Logic, Language, Literature,” chapter 3 of <i>Speech and Reality</i>, 67-97.</li> <li>• [Secondary] Harold Stahmer. “ ‘Speech-Letters’ and ‘Speech-Thinking’: Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy,” <i>Modern Judaism</i>, Feb. 1984, 57-81;</li> </ul>
Oct 7	<p><b>3. The Grammar Before and Beyond Our Grade-School Primers</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERH. “In Defense of the Grammatical Method,” chapter 1 in <i>Speech and Reality</i>, 9-44. “The Grammar of the Soul,” from <i>Practical Knowledge of the Soul</i>, ch. 5, 18-33.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Secondary] ERH. “Grammatical Health,” “Genus (Gender) and Life,” and “Editor’s Postscript,” chapters 12, 13 and 14 of <i>The Origin of Speech</i>, 110-129.</li> </ul>
Oct 14	<p><b>4. Time <i>vis-à-vis</i> Space in the “Cross of Reality”</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERH. “Articulated Speech,” chapter 2 from <i>Speech and Reality</i>, 45-66.</li> <li>• [Secondary] ERH. “The Penetration of the Cross,” ch. 7 in <i>The Christian Future</i> (165-198); Peter Leithart. “The Cross of Reality,” unpubl., 2017 (11 pages).</li> </ul>
Oct 21	BREAK
Oct 28	<p><b>5. Human Speech – Evolved Ululation, or the Posterity of Poetry?</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERH. “The Authentic Moment of Speech,” “The Four Diseases of Speech,” and “Church and State of Primitive Man,” from <i>The Origin of Speech</i>, the first three chapters, 2-27.</li> <li>• [Secondary] ERH. “The Speech of the Community,” ch. 9 from <i>Practical Knowledge of the Soul</i>, 48-61; “The Four Phases of Speech,” and “The Quadrilateral of Human Logic,” from <i>I Am an Impure Thinker</i>, 53-68.</li> </ul>
Nov 4	<p><b>6. History and Its Revolutions</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] selections from <i>Out of Revolution</i>.</li> <li>• [Secondary] Norman Fiering. “Heritage vs. History: ERH as a “Physician of Memory,” from <i>Understanding Rosenstock-Huessy</i>, 60-93.</li> </ul>
Nov 11	<p><b>7. “Judaism Despite Christianity”</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] ERH. “Prologue/Epilogue to the Letters – 50 Years Later,” 71-76; 171-194, from <i>Judaism Despite Christianity -The Letters on Christianity and Judaism between ERH and Franz Rosenzweig</i>.</li> <li>• [Secondary] Raymond Huessy. “A Reflection on the 1916 Correspondence between Rosenstock and Rosenberg,” in <i>The Fruit of Our Lips</i>, 303-311.</li> </ul>
Nov 18	<p><b>8. The Christian Future</b></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Primary] chapters from ERH. <i>The Christian Future</i>, 1946, and passages from <i>The Fruit of Our Lips</i>, 2021.</li> <li>• [Secondary] Peter Leithart. “Future and the Christian Era,” Theopolis, 2017.</li> </ul>

**Digitized copies of the primary and secondary readings will be posted on TEAMS, together with the audio of the lecture, in the “Files” folder.**

## **Books of Rosenstock's from which the digitized excerpts will be taken:**

### **ERH:**

*Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, Wipf & Stock, 2015 [German original: 1924].

*Judaism Despite Christianity*, Univ. of Chicago, 2011 [1935].

*Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man*, Wipf & Stock, 2013 [1938].

*The Christian Future, or The Modern Mind Outrun*, Harper Torchbooks, 1946; also Barakaldo Books, 2020.

*Speech and Reality*, Argo Books, 1970.

*I Am an Impure Thinker*, Argo Books, 1970.

*The Origin of Speech*, Argo Books, 1981.

*The Fruit of Our Lips: The Transformation of God's Word into the Speech of Mankind*, Wipf & Stock, 2021.

The most complete bibliography currently available is found here: [erhfund.org](http://erhfund.org)

### **Secondary sources in book form used for this seminar:**

Harold Stahmer. *"Speak That I May See Thee": The Religious Significance of Language*, Macmillan, 1968. On the major speech-thinkers, but with focus on ERH.

M. Darrol Bryant and Hans R. Huessy. *Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: Studies in His Life and Thought*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1986. Useful collection of essays on various aspects of the man's work.

George Allen Morgan. *Speech and Society: The Christian Linguistic Social Philosophy of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy*, Florida, 1987. Attempt at a comprehensive overview of Rosenstock, with biography and bibliography.

Norman Fiering. *Understanding Rosenstock-Huessy: A Haphazard Collection of Ventures*, Wipf & Stock, 2022. A personal and insightful reflection on ERH by one of his former students.

Wayne Cristaudo. *Religion, Redemption and Revolution*, Univ. of Toronto, 2012.

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Clinton C. Gardner. *Beyond Belief*, White River Press, 2008. Another former student's attempt to summarize the main features of Rosenstock's work. (on order)

### **Other shorter texts (articles, conferences) sourced directly in the schedule.**