

Panel 7: “Philosophies of History in Comparison: Voegelin and Rosenstock-Huessy”

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Welcome to this panel devoted to comparing the thought of Voegelin and his near contemporary and fellow-Austro-German emigré, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. I'm Glenn Hughes of St. Mary's University of San Antonio. This morning, we will hear presentations by four Rosenstock-Huessy scholars, who bring to their papers varying degrees of familiarity with Voegelin's work; and then we'll hear responses from Thomas Hollweck and myself, whose deep familiarity is with Voegelin, and also by Norman Fiering, an eminence in the world of Rosenstock-Huessy studies.

The responses will less paper-specific than attempts to address central questions that arise from all the papers, concerning similarities and differences between these two great thinkers.

The paper presentations will proceed in the order as listed in the catalogue: first, Wayne Cristaudo, professor and Division Head of West Studies in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Hong Kong; then Michael McDuffee, professor of History and Historical Theology at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago; then Gregory Kaplan, Anna Smith Fine Asst. Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University; and finally Andreas Leuttsch, professor at the Bielefeld School for Historical Research in Germany. Strict time limits.

Thomas Hollweck, professor of German Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Dr. Norman Fiering, Director and Librarian, *Emeritus*, of the John Carter Brown Library. 10 minutes each; myself 5 minutes.

To a degree I couldn't have surmised a year ago when asked by Ellis Sandoz to organize this panel, I'm convinced that Voegelin and Rosentsock-Huessy are two 20th c. thinkers whose comparison begs for close and sustained analysis, and yields startlingly rich insights and questions. I will make a few points as succinctly as I can, putting them mainly as questions.

Question 1. Are there any 20th century thinkers besides Voegelin and Rosenstock-Huessy who have addressed, on what might be described as a sufficiently Hegelian scale, the challenge of explicating the meaning of the process of human history—who have (though Rosenstock-Huessy might not like the phrase) proffered a philosophy of history worthy of the name? who have actually made some sense, in a detailed and overarching way, of what constitutes meaning in history? Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that “ordinary historical interpretations are pale and insipid in comparison with” Rosenstock-Huessy's vision of history; and I would say the same of Voegelin's philosophy. Thinkers such as Heidegger and Jaspers don't come close to their level of grasp of concrete historical detail, spiritual-linguistic sensitivity to originating experiences and their development, and coherent theoretical overview and vision. Tom McPartland makes a strong case that Lonergan's philosophy of history might belong in such company. Perhaps; but for the most part, major thinkers of the last century have shrunk from the challenge, or been inadequate to it.

Question 2. Without denying that there are real differences between their philosophies of history, are not their agreements more profound than their differences? Let me touch on a few central points of apparent divergence, where even a close reader of both thinkers might be tempted, I think, to arrive at premature conclusions.

1) Is it in fact the case that, for Voegelin, openness to reality and existentially sound responsiveness to participation in history is more “rationalistic” or “reason-based,” as we commonly understand these terms, than it is “love-based,” as in Rosenstock-Huessy? Voegelin's recurrent treatments of *nous* and *noetic* orientation within reality need to be read in light of his constant, and constantly ignored, insistence that the core of “reason” or *nous* as understood by Plato, above all, has as its dynamic core the movements in the soul of love and hope and trust. There is no profound search for order, for Voegelin, including the philosophical, that is not in truth guided first and foremost by love. And he also makes clear that the Christian vision of God as love is the coming-to-fruit of philosophical *eros* and loving responsiveness to the divine ground. Is this not more consonant with Rosenstock-Huessy's outlook than is usually granted?

2) Wayne has deftly identified Voegelin's work as a search for *order* in history, and Rosenstock's as a

search for *love* (and the refusal of love) in history. This is telling and evocative, and fair to each thinker's language—but it may describe what is ultimately a weak divergence rather than a strong one, once Voegelin's vision of history is fully appreciated. For as he makes clear, history is above all, for Voegelin, a process of exodus, of repeated exodus, from less to more incarnationally profound forms of living in attunement with the divine ground who is Love—an exodus whose essence and mode of movement, as Augustine understood and expressed, *is* love, the love that repeatedly leaves behind a form of life that has been revealed, through advancing spiritual insight, to be a life in existential exile. At the same time and for the same reason, history for Voegelin is a process of transfiguration, of “the structure of reality recognizable moving beyond its present structure”—not toward some eschatological flash of disappearance into some pure transcendence, but a transfiguration occurring in the incarnate souls of human beings whose existence in the in-between of world and Beyond cannot be fulfilled except in a *transfigured in-between*—that is, incarnationally, if indeed mysteriously so.

3) And does this last question not suggest that perhaps there is not such a sharp divergence, upon close analysis, between Rosenstock's “anti-transcendental” view and Voegelin's continual focus upon *transcendence* as “the basic problem of philosophy”? It is very difficult to recognize the deep importance of Voegelin's insistence that transcendence is an “exegetical, not a descriptive” term, and of his accompanying insistence that all we know, and are, of the divine occurs in the *metaxy*, the in-between, wherein transcendent reality—though disastrously ignored when eclipsed by modern planners and envisioners of political existence—is never experienced as other than an index, one pole as it were, of an existential and historical reality that unfolds transfiguratively only within the interplay and interpenetration of God and incarnate meaning. Might it not be fair to say that for both thinkers, redemptive movement in time and history only occurs in and through time and history?