
Personal Reflections

Edward Rozek: A Student's Tribute

Steven Alan Samson

Liberty University

Time and again life has been trying to teach me a lesson, but I must admit that I have been a rather slow learner. It is a lesson about the vanity of fame and fortune: what most of us, myself included, strive for day and night.

In a dream not too long ago I imagined myself walking down the corridor of a lecture hall—quiet, empty, and dark—at the University of Colorado. It appears that I am a courier bearing a secret dispatch for my old mentor. When I greet him in the darkened hall he takes me to the side and says: “I am dying.” Suddenly I awoke, several hours before dawn. In the stillness of the house I sat in my easy chair and gave myself over to nocturnal reflections, relieved that the dream was only a dream. But could anything have happened to my mentor?

Some time afterward I received a long letter from my mentor that de-

scribed his recent trip to Europe to attend the funeral of his old tank commander, Gen. Stanislaw Maczek. Dr. Rozek illustrated the consequences of the betrayal at Yalta by recounting the General's life in exile following the Communist takeover of Poland. As I read I knew that it was not just Gen. Maczek's story he was telling me. Between the lines I could discern his own.

Some men have the gift of perseverance: the ability to stand in the face of persecution, the fortitude to endure having so much of what they cherish snatched away, the character to withstand being unjustly passed over in one's career due to differences of opinion. These are some of the qualities that my mentor, Edward Rozek, has exhibited as a teacher in the more than three decades I have known him. He has been one of my chief guides: the Virgil to my often-uncomprehending Dante, who showed

me the perils of the journey ahead. He is the one professor who touched my soul, who exemplified the kind of strength that may be gained through suffering and, beyond suffering, faith. If his word was his pledge, even more was his life his testimony, bearing the marks of mortal combat with Nazism in his body and moral combat with Communism in his soul.

As I reach back through the years, beginning in 1967, I can now appreciate more fully many of the lessons he set before me. Two books we read in class on the governments of Germany and Russia stood out in my mind: *The Origins of Russian Communism* by Nicolas Berdyaev and *The Question of German Guilt* by Karl Jaspers. Later, as I advanced in my studies, I came to know them as the works of "existentialist philosophers." But in this initial contact we skipped the customary terminological formalities. Instead, I was plunged immediately into the passionate witness they bore against the false gods of the age. As a result, my university education slowly, fitfully, began to take shape in response to the challenge these authors posed.

I went on to read more of Berdyaev and Jaspers. I did not stop with them, of course. Neither did I look back, but the issues I wrestled with then engage me even now. Memories from these years frequently stray into my dreams. My late night dream-walk through a corridor at the University of Colorado reminded me how, as we walk through life, we see "through a

glass, darkly." Dr. Rozek confronted us in class with the specter of man's inhumanity to man, giving flesh to what otherwise must remain an abstraction. Who could fail to hear the force of words that rose from the depth of personal experience? His was a dignified voice, a cultivated voice. It took much effort for me to hear him, because to my ears it was also a foreign voice. In time and with effort I learned to attune my ears to the cadences of his speech.

And what a remarkable voice! He always spoke with quiet authority, with conviction, about the blight of totalitarian oppression and, closer to home, the petty tyrannies that waylay us. If he was, on the one hand, a lightning rod who defied the revolution on campus, he was also, first and foremost, *our* teacher. Few men have commanded such respect from their students. When anti-war protests led to the cancellation of classes, we crossed picket lines in 1970 to take our final exams. We voted with our feet (one of his favorite phrases in another context). Our contract with him did not contain an escape clause.

In *Out of Revolution*, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's explanation of "why teaching is a public trust" is perfectly clear to me. It has been my good fortune to have sat under a genuine "public professor" who addressed the crucial issues, who "uttered this 'All or nothing' from his public *Katheders* (chair)," and who gave his all for the sake of his students. Throughout a long teaching career, Dr. Rozek has embodied the old

ideal of the university as the keeper of the nation's conscience.

I did not really understand the battles that swirled about us on campus in those days. Yet I learned to discern with my heart the quality of a man's character and to cleave to what proved true. Understanding came later. Dr. Rozek represented the priority of principle over the fashion of the moment. Certain phrases come back to me, especially those he directed toward the campus revolutionaries, with whom he carried on an extended debate. "You are entitled to the courage of your confusions," he would respond to a student's heedless remarks.

He brought many distinguished speakers, like Sidney Hook, Edward Teller, and Nikolai Tolstoy, to campus through the W. F. Dyde Forum and his Institute for the Study of Comparative Politics and Ideologies. My first real lesson in journalistic dissimulation came the morning after a talk by Milovan Drachkovich at the W. F. Dyde Forum in 1967 when the student newspaper carried an account filled with incredible distortions. How could the writer even have been in the audience? I wrote a letter to the editor in protest. My letter was published, but in mangled form. Dialogue is impossible unless it is undertaken in good faith on both sides.

This initial experience with ideological deceit has been repeated countless times over the years. But one lesson, at least, began to sink into my heart even then. It is a lesson that has served me well when-

ever I have given it heed: To guard my tongue. I was raised in an open society, or so I was led to believe. I read Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, and others who suffered persecution, but did not understand what it meant to be persecuted, to live underground, to speak circumspectly. If I absorbed anything from Dr. Rozek's classes, it should have been the realization that not everyone means us well. It is not healthy to be an open book to those who scorn books as mere pretexts, who are "enemies of the permanent things." This, then, is another of the lessons I learned, not just in the classroom, but in that laboratory of experience just outside its walls.

I left the university in 1974 and moved back to Oregon a year later. Much time would pass before I first became conscious of what one article called "the persecution of Edward Rozek." In April 1983 I learned through a friend that Dr. Rozek had been indicted on multiple felony counts in connection with his summer institute. Long under attack for his political convictions, his integrity was now being challenged in full public view: all this, I learned afterward, while recovering from a near-fatal car accident.

He had earlier mentioned some trouble during one of my occasional telephone calls to him, but even with this early alert I was unprepared for the story that I later pieced together. The accusations originally had been floated during the heat of Dr. Rozek's 1980 campaign for a seat on the Board of Regents. Although an investigation by the Board cleared

him, a county judge appointed a special prosecutor. His home and office were raided by police officers. At one point he was handcuffed and taken to jail. For months after the indictment it seemed that a political and judicial juggernaut was bearing down on him. Then, strand by strand, the highly sensationalized case against him began to unravel. Finally, a year later, the last charges were quietly dismissed. No member of the press was present. It was not until I read Ann Donnelly's story of his ordeal in *Academic License: The War on Academic Freedom* (1988) that I knew even half of what he went through. I wept as I read it.

Some years later Dr. Rozek invited my whole family to come to Boulder so I could attend the summer institute. We stayed in an apartment on campus. I showed my wife and four children the places where I had lived, studied, and hiked: places that still occasionally haunt my dreams. It was so good to see Dr. Rozek back in his true element and, once again, to be drawn into a close study of the drama of international politics.

A few days after my strange dream, I pulled my copy of Rosenstock-Huessy's *Speech and Reality* from the shelf. I had added it to my library late in 1983 while Dr. Rozek was in the midst of his ordeal. At the time I was writing my dissertation and set the book aside. Taking up now where I had left off a decade earlier, I was engrossed in its discussion of pedagogy when a passage that describes the vocation of a

teacher caught my attention: "We speak our mind. Any thought about the life and death of our own group compels us to convey it to others. We cannot keep the thought to ourselves forever, however slow we may be to talk to our neighbors about it. . . . Death cannot be fought in society except through engaging younger men to join the battle-front. Social disintegration compels older men to speak to younger men. Education is not a luxury for the sake of the younger individual; is it not very often their ruin? However, society needs allies in its fight against decline. The true form of social thought is teaching."

If this is true, where else should such a battle take place if not within our schools, universities, and other public forums—at the confluence of *Wissen* and *Gewissen*: science and conscience?

The campus, it seems in retrospect, was my introduction to Vanity Fair. Though it may not have been my ruin, it was nevertheless in many ways a rough awakening, as is any education worth its salt. It is this journey of the spirit that I remember most from those years. It was, for me, the beginning of the life of the mind. Because of Edward Rozek it was and has remained also a pilgrimage of the heart.

Philosophy begins with the recognition that we are dying. The question then becomes: How are we to use the time and opportunities given us, to be faithful stewards of the gifts entrusted to us? All else is vanity.