

Facing the Effaced:
Mystical Eschatology and the Idealistic Orientation
in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig

Elliot R. Wolfson

To the blessed memory
of my teacher,
Marvin Fox

“Es wäre Lüge, wollte die Sehnsucht vergessen, was sie schon besitzt,
aber es wäre der Tod, wollte der Besitz verlernen, sich zu sehnen”.

Franz Rosenzweig

Offenbarungsglaube and the Crisis of Historicism

Throughout *The Star of Redemption* Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929)¹ is engaged in a passionate struggle to overcome death, finitude, and temporal existence. Indeed, one might say that the victory of eternity over time is the leitmotif of the book. It is thus hardly an accident that the book begins with “Concerning Death” (Vom Tode) and ends with “Into Life” (Ins Leben).² Beginning his theological reflections with the words “concerning death” underscores the fact that, for Rosenzweig, the totalizing effect of philosophical Idealism – epitomized in the subtitle of the introduction, *über die Möglichkeit das All zu erkennen*, followed by the expression *in philosophos* – was such that the uniqueness of the

¹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, translated by William W. Hallo, Boston (Beacon Press) 1972, hereafter cited as SR. In preparation of this paper I have consulted the German edition, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Frankfurt am Main (Suhrkamp Verlag) 1990.

² See Else-Rahel Freund, *Franz Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Existence. An Analysis of 'The Star of Redemption'*, translated by Stephen L. Weinstein and Robert Israel, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr, The Hague (Martinus Nijhoff) 1979, 3; Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1992, 36–40; Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations. The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press), 1994, 70–71. See, however, Nahum Glatzer's foreword to Hallo's translation of SR, xvii. Glatzer challenges the commonly accepted opinion that the overcoming of death is the leitmotif of Rosenzweig's treatise. In support of his contention, Glatzer notes that the book originally did not begin with the words “Concerning death”. These were added later as a dramatic overture.

subject was neglected, a uniqueness that becomes most apparent in the death of each individual, which is concomitantly the birth of the self.³ The figure of the tragic hero plays a critical role in Rosenzweig's analysis, for he is the one who is described as being consumed with his own dying through the experience of the death of a friend. "His whole existence becomes the enduring of this one encounter; his life gets death, his own death, which he beheld in the death of his friend, as its sole content. ... Death, his own death, has become the sovereign event of his life. He himself has entered that sphere where the world becomes strange to man with its alternation of screaming and silence, the sphere of pure and lofty speechlessness, the self".⁴

By confronting the death of his personality, which is essentially the individual nature shaped by social context and political environment, the tragic hero embraces the character of his solitary self: "Thus the self is born on a definite day. Which day is this? It is the day on which the personality, the individual, dies the death of entering the genus. This very moment lets the self be born. The self is a *daimon*, not in the sense of Goethe's orphic stanza where the word designates just the personality, but in the sense of the Heraclitean saying, '*Daimon* is for man his ethos'".⁵ To understand Rosenzweig's conception of the self, one must ponder his citation of the aphorism of Heraclitus cited by Strobæus, ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων,⁶ which is rendered verbatim in the *Star* as "Sein Ethos ist dem Menschen Daimon". The import of the Heraclitean statement, at least as understood by Rosenzweig, is that the character of a man, which is revealed at death, is his true destiny. The death of individuality summons the birth of the self, but with the death of the individual personality

³ The attack on German idealist philosophy is also the subject of Rosenzweig's *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York (Noonday Press) 1953, and see the editor's "Introduction", 12–14. Rosenzweig's criticism of philosophical idealism's neglect of the individual shares a basic affinity with the existential approach of the nineteenth-century Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard. See Michael Oppenheim, Søren Kierkegaard and Franz Rosenzweig. *The Movement From Philosophy to Religion*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976, 161–204. On the complex relation of philosophy and theology in Rosenzweig's new thinking, see Emil L. Fackenheim, Review of Franz Rosenzweig. *His Life and Thought* by Nahum Glatzer, in: *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim. A Reader*, edited by Michael L. Morgan, Detroit (Wayne State University Press) 1987, 59–64; Paul Mendes-Flohr, Franz Rosenzweig's Concept of Philosophical Faith, in: *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34, 1989, 357–369; Michael L. Morgan, *Dilemmas in Modern Jewish Thought. The Dialectics of Revelation and History*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 1992, 125–132.

⁴ SR, 76–77.

⁵ SR, 71.

⁶ See Charles H. Kahan, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1979, 252–253, 260–261.

the self "returns home" and "awakes to an ultimate individuation and solitude".⁷ This birth of the daimonic self is actually a second birth, a rebirth of one's character that was born the first time when the infant exited its mother's womb. As Rosenzweig puts the matter, the "speechless, sightless, and introverted *daimon* assaults man first in the guise of *Eros*,⁸ and then accompanies him through life until the moment that he removes his disguise and reveals himself to him as *Thanatos*".⁹

In a manner similar to the existentialist strand in the thought of Martin Heidegger,¹⁰ Rosenzweig understood that the concrete sense of selfhood, which in contrast to the abstract universal "man" is the factual starting point of philosophical/theological rumination, is nowhere more apparent than in death, since death is the ontic event that cannot be shared. The nonrelatedness of death marks it as the most individuating experience that the self undergoes in its temporal comportment. Indeed, the *daimon* is not only reborn at death, but in its rebirth it sheds the masquerade of *Eros* and confronts the self as *Thanatos*. In contrast to Heidegger, however, Rosenzweig's notion of the soul, which is the truest dimension of the interior self, is not the historical *Dasein* cut off from all forms of transcendence or relatedness. On the contrary, the soul in its inmost being is in dialogical relationship with the other. Rosenzweig ar-

⁷ SR, 71.

⁸ The description of the daimon as *Eros* may reflect the statement of Plato in the *Symposium* 202e where Diotima describes *Eros* as a "great daimon" (*δαίμων μέγας*), which is "midway between what is divine and what is mortal". The significance of the daimonic in Heidegger's philosophy is explored in detail by David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life. Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 1992. A comparison of Rosenzweig and Heidegger from this perspective might prove instructive. See below, n. 10. On the notion of "daimonic eruption" in Rosenzweig and other German Jewish thinkers, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *A Rustling in the Woods. The Turn to Myth in Weimar Jewish Thought*, in: *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth*, edited by S. Daniel Breslauer, Albany (State University of New York Press), 1997, 104–109.

⁹ SR, 71.

¹⁰ The philosophical reflections of Heidegger and Rosenzweig have been compared by a number of scholars. See Karl Löwith, *M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity*, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, 1942, 53–77; Rivka G. Horwitz, *Franz Rosenzweig on Language*, in: *Judaism* 13, 1964, 393–406, esp. 402–403; Reinhold Mayer, *Franz Rosenzweig. Eine Philosophie der dialogischen Erfahrung*, Munich (Chr. Kaiser Verlag), 1973, 116–122; Steven S. Schwarzschild, *Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Heidegger. The German and the Jewish Turn to Ethnicism*, in: *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929). Internationaler Kongreß Kassel 1986, Bd. II, Das neue Denken und seine Dimensionen*, edited by Wolfdieterich Schmied-Kowarzik, Freiburg/Munich (Verlag Karl Alber) 1988, 887–889; Alan Udoff, *Rosenzweig's Heidegger Reception and the re-Origination of Jewish Thinking*, in: *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig, 923–950; Stéphane Mosès, System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, translated by Catherine Tihanyi, Detroit (Wayne State University Press) 1992, 290–293; Cohen, *Elevations* (n. 2), 40–66; Wasserstrom, *A Rustling in the Woods* (n. 8), 103.

ticulates this idea in a particularly dramatic and vivid way in his short treatise, *Das Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand*, which went unpublished in the author's lifetime: "Whenever I encounter man, I shall steep my countenance in his until it reflects his every feature. Even should I confront only the shadow of a face, buried deep in the mute and accusing eyes of an animal or in the silent gaze of ancient ritual stones, I shall submerge myself in them until I have absorbed their countenances and thus come in contact with everything that ever existed. Thus, traveling about the earth, I shall come face to face with my own Self. The innumerable masks of the innumerable instants, yours and mine, they are my countenance".¹¹ By facing the other one faces oneself, for the masks worn by the other constitute the countenance of the self. The self mirrors the world at the same time that the world mirrors the self.¹² The world's essence cannot be reduced to human thought, for language is merely the bridge that connects the distinct elements of man and world.¹³ "To utter a word is to affix a seal as a witness of man's presence".¹⁴ The ultimate other that the soul confronts in the discovery and unmasking of itself is the eternal Thou. By facing and responding to God, man becomes the genuine self. Death is not overcome by the authentic appropriation of one's "finitude of temporality", the Heideggerian "being towards death" (*Sein zum Tode*),¹⁵ which is described as "one's ownmost non-relational possibility",¹⁶ but by the recognition of one's essential relatedness to the eternal life that is other than oneself. To express the matter in terms of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, whose indebtedness

¹¹ Rosenzweig, *Understanding* (n. 3), 67.

¹² Rosenzweig, *Understanding* 59.

¹³ Rosenzweig, *Understanding* 68. The central role played by language in the empiricist new thinking of Rosenzweig has been noted by a many scholars of which I here offer a representative sampling: Rivka Horwitz, *Franz Rosenzweig on Language* (n. 10); Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Concept of Language in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig*, in: *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr, Hannover (University of New England Press) 1988, 172–184.

¹⁴ Rosenzweig, *Understanding*, 59.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York (Harper & Row, Publishers) 1962, 276–277, 304–311, 354, 426, 438, 442. A succinct formulation of Heidegger's position is given in his 1924 lecture, *Der Begriff der Zeit*, published as *The Concept of Time*, translated by William McNeill, Oxford (Blackwell Publishers) 1992, 11: "For the reason the Dasein of Others is unable to substitute for Dasein in the authentic sense ... I never have the Dasein of the Other in the original way, the sole appropriate way of having Dasein: I never *am* the Other. ... The end of my Dasein, my death, is not some point at which a sequence of events suddenly breaks off, but a possibility which Dasein knows of in this or that way: the most extreme possibility of itself, which it can seize and appropriate as standing before it. ... The self-interpretation of Dasein which towers over every other statement of certainty and authenticity is its interpretation with respect to its death, *the indeterminate certainty of its ownmost possibility of being at an end.*"

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 354.

to Rosenzweig is well-known,¹⁷ it is the alterity of the divine, that which is beyond the world and beyond human existence, that guarantees the meaningfulness of history and the fullness of each moment.¹⁸ The dialogical character of death as the moment in which the lonely self encounters the solitary God is related especially to the holiest and most solemn of Jewish festivals, New Year's Day (Rosh ha-Shanah) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur): "Man is utterly alone on the day of his death, when he is clothed in his shroud, and in the prayers of these days he is alone. They too set him, lonely and naked, straight before the throne of God. ... On the Days of Awe too, he confronts the eyes of his judge in utter loneliness, as if he were dead in the midst of life, a member of the community of man which, like himself, has placed itself beyond the grave in the very fullness of living. ... On the Day of Atonement ... God lifts up his countenance to this united and lonely pleading of men in their shrouds, men beyond the grave, of a community of souls, God who loves man both before and after he is sinned ... And so man to whom the divine countenance is lifted bursts out into the exultant profession: 'The Lord is God': this God of love, he alone is God!"¹⁹

One must begin by taking death seriously, but it is not the endpoint that determines and limits human potentiality. Death is only the beginning, the way that leads unto life. This is the import of the key biblical verse that betokens the individual's surpassing the ontological limitation of human existence, "love is as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6). In the authentic dialogue of revelation, the two appearances of the self, Eros and Thanatos, converge such that death comes in the guise of love. The mythic identification of love and death is ritually enacted in the Jewish

¹⁷ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, (Duquesne University Press) 1969, 28: "We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung*, a work too often present in this book to be cited." See Levinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand, Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University Press) 190, 181–201; and the "Foreword" to Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 13–22. Rosenzweig's influence on Levinas has been noted by Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption. Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 1991, 36, 198–201, 252–253, 266–268, 286–288. For two recent comparative analyses of Rosenzweig and Levinas, see Gibbs, *Correlations* (n. 2), and Cohen, *Elevations* (n. 2).

¹⁸ See Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 293. On the dialogical element in Rosenzweig's thought, see the extensive study of Bernhard Kasper, *Das Dialogische Denken. Eine Untersuchung der Religionsphilosophischen Bedeutung Franz Rosenzweigs, Ferdinand Ebners, and Martin Bubers*, Freiburg (Herder) 1967, 69–197, 349–379; Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy From Kierkegaard to Buber*, translated by Arnold A. Gerstein, foreword by Nathan Rotenstreich, Albany (State University of New York Press) 1991, 173–214; Wolfdietch Schmiel-Kowarzik, *Franz Rosenzweig. Existentielles Denken und Gelebte Bewährung*, Freiburg/München (Verlag Karl Alber) 1991, 175–214.

¹⁹ SR, 326–327.

wedding ceremony by the bridegroom's donning of the shroud under the bridal canopy as well as at the Passover seder when the father wears the shroud to celebrate the redemption of Israel from their servitude to the Egyptians. On both of these occasions (in contrast to the Day of Atonement) the garments worn in death become wedding attire to celebrate the transition from creation to revelation and to signify thereby that love is as strong as death.²⁰ Interestingly enough, in another passage, Rosenzweig asserts that the convergence related by this verse applies only to the female beloved, indeed to the "most feminine woman above all" (*und gerade dem weiblichsten am meisten*), and not to the male lover for whom the twofold encounter with the self must occur in successive stages, first as Eros and then as Thanatos. For the woman, by contrast, the tremors of love are sufficient to bring about the eternity experienced as a result of the tremors of death. "A young woman can be as ready for eternity as a man only becomes when his threshold is crossed by Thanatos. ... Once touched by Eros, a woman is what man only becomes at the Faustian age of a hundred: ready for the final encounter – strong as death".²¹

Rosenzweig's use of gender images should not be interpreted within a narrow biological framework. That is to say, the "most feminine woman" is not necessarily limited to someone of the female sex. On the contrary, the exegetical context of Song of Songs necessitates the metaphorical application of the feminine persona to the soul and that of the masculine to the divine. The female beloved who encounters the male lover is none other than the self (which may be embodied in either a man or a woman) who visually confronts the face of God. Thus, in the revelatory moment, and revelation is always of the moment, the present of love challenges and overcomes the past of death. "For the soul, revelation means the experience of a present which, while it rests on the presence of a past, nevertheless does not make its home in it but walks in the light of the divine countenance".²² The appropriation of self that arises from the dialogic encounter with God entails the "courage to find ourselves present in the truth, the courage to say our Truly in midst of the Truth. For so we may, since the ultimate truth is none other than – ours. God's truth is none other than the love with which he loves us. The light with

²⁰ SR, 326.

²¹ SR, 156.

²² SR, 157. Cf. Rosenzweig's description of the revelatory experience in his notes to the two poems of Judah Halevi, which he translated respectively as *Nachts* and *Ereignis*, in: Barbara E. Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi. Translating, Translations, and Translators*, Montreal (McGill-Queen's University Press) 1995, 187–188: "God reveals in revelation always only just this – revelation. In other words: he reveals always only Himself to the human, to the human only. ... Revelation is experience and event. Genuine experience only, because and when it also has been event, genuine event only, because and when it can become experience again and again."

which the truth illuminates is none other than the word to which our Truly makes answer".²³

Rosenzweig's preoccupation with temporality is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his axiomatic acceptance of the three basic theological categories: creation (Schöpfung), revelation (Offenbarung), and redemption (Erlösung). Each of these directly corresponds to a dimension of time: creation to the ever-renewed past, revelation to the ever-enduring present, and redemption to the ever-coming future. For Rosenzweig, each of these temporal modes receives an ontological status only by virtue of its given theological correlate. Rosenzweig's theology, therefore, might properly be called an ontology of finitude or a metaphysics of time. Closely connected with the question of time is that of history. The connection of time and history was perceived by Rosenzweig, as it was by many thinkers of his day, specifically as the "crisis of historicism", i. e., the belief that all human phenomena must be viewed and evaluated from the perspective of historical evolution.²⁴ The inevitable result of such a process of historicizing was the relativization of all values and the undermining of the universality of reason: Ideas and values were no longer interpreted as expressions of absolute, timeless, and universal realities, but as historically conditioned by a particular (and hence relative) context. To understand Rosenzweig's theology and, particularly, his eschatology, one must appreciate his struggle with the problem of historicism.²⁵ This

²³ SR, 392.

²⁴ The scholarly literature on this subject is vast. I will cite a few of the most relevant sources: Benedetto Croce, *History As the Story of Liberty*, translated by Sylvia Sprigge London (George Allen and Unwin Ltd.) 1941; Friedrich Engel-Janosi, *The Growth of German Historicism*, Baltimore (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science, Series 62, no. 2) 1944; Morris R. Cohen, *The Meaning of Human History*, Illinois (The Open Court Publishing Co.) 1947; Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge. Philosophy, Science, and History since Hegel*, New Haven (Yale University Press) 1950; Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, *The Meaning of 'Historicism'*, in: *American Historical Review* 60, 1954, 568–577; Carlo Antoni, *From History to Sociology. The Transition in German Historical Thinking*, translated by Hayden V. White, Detroit (Wayne State University Press) 1959; Calvin G. Rand, *Two Meanings of Historicism in the Writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, 1964, 503–518; Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason. A Study in Nineteenth Century Thought*, Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University Press) 1971; David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism*, Berkeley (University of California Press) 1987.

²⁵ See Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism*, in: *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 138–161. See also Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *From Relativism to Religious Faith. The Testimony of Franz Rosenzweig's Unpublished Diaries*, in: *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 22, 1977, 161–174; Gershon Greenberg, *Franz Rosenzweigs Zwiespältige Gottessicht. Von der Zeit und in Ewigkeit*, *Judaica* 34, 1978, 27–34, 76–89; Steven T. Katz, *On Historicism and Eternity, Reflections on the 100th Birthday of Franz Rosenzweig*, in: *Schmied-Kowarzik, Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 10), 745–769.

struggle, in fact, chronologically preceded his affirmation of a faith position, but continued well after his religious conversion. Thus, in the last of his letters to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig wrote that the unity we attribute to the multiplicity of historical epochs derives from only one source, human scholarship. Without the efforts of scholars "history would seem to be a discontinuous series (as in fact in really is) and not (as it ought to appear) the parable of a single point, a *nunc stans* (as history really is in the final moment, but thanks to scholarship, as I have said, appears to be already in advance, here and now)".²⁶

Rosenzweig implicitly ascribes messianic significance to the task of the historian, for the recollection of the past fosters a sense of continuity in time that is inherently lacking in the sequential flow of temporality.²⁷ The historian's rendering of history, therefore, presumes an element of stability, which is characteristic of history in its eschatological transformation. Significantly, the historical account of history is depicted by Rosenzweig in narratological terms: History is the parable of a single point. Underlying this comment is Rosenzweig's belief that history itself is redeemed by a mythical transformation. That is, history possesses a redemptive potential only insofar as it is circumscribed within a framework of myth.²⁸ Rosenzweig intended precisely this point when he wrote to Rosenstock-Huessy that revelation "brings an absolute symbolical order into history" (*daß sie eine absolute symbolische Ordnung in die Geschichte bringt*).²⁹ When the historical event is narrated in terms of the symbolic myth of revelation, it actualizes its eschatological potential, and linear time is eternalized in the circular rhythms of the sacred time of liturgy and ritual.³⁰ In the present, unredeemed state, however, history is nothing but permanent change, a ceaseless chain of events that are not narrated within any defined mythic structure. A similar description of history occurs in the *Star*: "Life can either be all rest or all motion. And since time cannot be denied, motion triumphs. 'You cannot step twice into the same river'. History seems to fade away in unobstructed alternation and transformation".³¹ To depict the nature of history, Rosen-

²⁶ Judaism Despite Christianity. The "Letters on Christianity and Judaism" Between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig, edited by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Alabama (The University of Alabama Press) 1969, 168.

²⁷ See Mendes-Flohr, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 25), 158.

²⁸ The nexus of myth and history in Rosenzweig is discussed against his general intellectual background by Wasserstrom, *Rustling* (n. 8), 102–103, 105–106.

²⁹ Briefe, edited by Edith Rosenzweig in collaboration with Ernst Simon, Berlin (Schocken Verlag) 1935, 710, cited in Alexander Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig on History, in: *Between East and West. Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horovitz*, edited by Alexander Altmann, London (East and West Library) 1963, 210.

³⁰ See Oppenheim, Søren Kierkegaard (n. 3), 241–305; Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 186–200. On the role of prayer in establishing the "human world order", see SR, 267–268.

³¹ SR, 332–333.

zweig employs the Heraclitean maxim of change, flux, and becoming: In des gleichen Flusses Welle steigt Du nicht zum zweiten Mal. The use of this maxim clearly reflects Rosenzweig's preoccupation with the crisis of historicism. The view of history as that which fades away in "unobstructed alternation and transformation" is the assumption that lies behind the theological stance adopted by Rosenzweig and the negative catalyst that elicits his belief in revelation (*Offenbarungsgläubigkeit*).³²

The direct relation of this crisis to theology in Rosenzweig's mind first becomes prominent in the essay, "Atheistische Theologie", written in 1914, the year following his transformative experience. In the essay, Rosenzweig attacks those "modern" theologians, Protestant and Jewish alike, who attempted to explain theological discourse on purely human terms: "We see this happening in our midst. Now, instead of showing – in the eternity of the philosophical thought or in the temporality of the historical process – the human under the power of the divine, the divine is shown to be the self-projection of the human against a sky of myth".³³ In the case of Christianity, "the rationalistic humanization of the Christ figure developed into the Life-of-Jesus theology", whereas in the case of Judaism, "the rationalistic deification of the people developed into the Jewish-People theology".³⁴ In the case of both religions, the divine was reduced to the human and, consequently, God as the transcendent, the "wholly Other", was eliminated from theological discourse. Moreover, the existential experience of God as transcendent, which constitutes the essence of faith based on revelation, was rendered obsolete. Rosenzweig credits, or better, discredits these theologies as being "antagonistic to revelation" for they mutually sought "to invalidate revelation entirely by depicting it as mythology".³⁵ "Therein lies the deepest meaning of the whole movement. The distinction between God and man, which was a stumbling block for all new and old paganism (i. e. idealistic philosophy), appears to be abolished; the offensive notion of revelation (i. e. offensive to reason) as the pouring forth of a superior content into an unworthy vessel is silenced".³⁶ The new theologians wanted to remove God from their theology – hence the ironic title of the essay.

The elimination of God and revelation from theology would be justified, Rosenzweig contends, if man felt unified and whole, lacking noth-

³² Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *Relativism* (n. 25), 161–162. See also the collection of essays in Richard Schaeffler, Bernhard Kasper, Shemaryahu Talmon, Yehoshua Amir, *Offenbarung im Denken Franz Rosenzweigs*, Essen (Ludgerus Verlag) 1979.

³³ Franz Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology. From the Old to the New Way of Thinking*, translated by Robert G. Goldy and H. Frederick Holch, in: *Canadian Journal of Theology* 14, 1968, 84.

³⁴ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*.

³⁵ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*, 84–85.

³⁶ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*, 85.

ing. "If the one part, namely man, would be in himself simple and without inner contradiction, then the man of thought as well as the man of action could dispense with God".³⁷ But the situation is decisively not so; indeed, it is precisely the opposite of this: "man now finds himself under the curse of historicity",³⁸ that is to say, he is adrift in the sea of history without a sense of whence or whither, without destiny or direction. Modern man is alienated and fractured. Thus, Rosenzweig concludes, "he is unable to eliminate the God to whom by his historical deed (i. e. revelation) the historicity of history is subject".³⁹ Historical existence is rendered meaningful only by virtue of its relationship to God who is outside history. It is through revelation, and revelation alone, that one can experience God.⁴⁰

Historicism, as we noted, inevitably led to cultural and religious relativism. Rosenzweig as an historian was presented with such a picture; as a theologian he tried to remedy it. History, he eventually came to realize, cannot be rendered meaningful on its own terms; it cannot by itself produce its own justification, it cannot be its own ground. It is precisely at this point that theology comes to the rescue: By God pouring forth His love to humanity in revelation,⁴¹ the latter is given an absolute, an Archimedean point, by which spatial and temporal coordinates are fixed once and for all. Revelation orients humanity in time and in space. Rosenzweig, using the language of Rosenstock-Huessy,⁴² describes the experience of revelation in the following terms: "Revelation is orientation. After revelation there exists a real Above and a real Below in the world ... and a genuinely fixed Before and Hereafter in time. In 'natural' space and in 'natural' time the point where I happen to be is the center of the universe ('Man is the measure of all'); in the space-time of revelation the center is a fixed point. I do not alter it with my movements and changes".⁴³

Historicism is a crisis only for the heathen or pagan, i. e., the one who lacks "the framework of reality (das Knochengerüst der Wirklichkeit), the unambiguous orientation (die eindeutige Richtung), the fixed

³⁷ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*, 88.

³⁸ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*.

³⁹ Rosenzweig, *Atheistic Theology*.

⁴⁰ See Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 209.

⁴¹ Compare Rosenzweig's characterization of revelation as divine love in his *Urzelle des Stern der Erlösung*, in: *Kleinere Schriften*, Berlin (Schocken Verlag) 1937, 357, and in further detail SR, 156–164. See Joshua O. Haberman, Franz Rosenzweig's *Doctrine of Revelation*, in: *Judaism* 18, 1969, 320–336.

⁴² See Schmied-Kowarzik, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 18), 121–173. On Rosenstock-Huessy's theory of language, see Bergman, *Dialogical Thinking*, 103–170, and the fuller analysis in Wilfrid Rohrbach, *Das Sprachdenken Eugen Rosenstock-Huessys. Historische Erörterung und Systematische Explikation*, Stuttgart (Verlag W. Kohlhammer) 1973.

⁴³ Naharayim, Jerusalem (Bialik Institute) 1960, 206.

position (der feste Platz), the knowledge of right and wrong, above and below, which enters the world only with revelation".⁴⁴ The crisis of meaning is overcome not by natural reason, but by opening up to that which comes to us from outside the boundaries of nature, for the meaning of history is found not in time but rather in its horizon in eternity. History has direction and purpose not on its own terms but only in reference to that which is beyond history. Revelation, in Rosenzweig's own words, is a "historical-cum-meta-historical concept",⁴⁵ for it breaks into history from a position outside of history. This breaking through is that which orders an otherwise chaotic and ceaselessly changing world.

Revelation forms the nucleus of Rosenzweig's religious philosophy and existential concerns. It is the possibility of revelation, which is always in the present, that experientially justifies the other two theological categories, creation and redemption.⁴⁶ Without the possibility of revelation in the present one could not know either the past of creation or the future of redemption. "Creation and redemption, too, are revealed in revelation, creation because it was done for the sake of redemption and this, in a narrower sense, is actually the creation of revelation; redemption because revelation bids us wait for it".⁴⁷ Revelation is the critical phenomenological datum of Rosenzweig's philosophy based on experience (*erfahrende Philosophie*),⁴⁸ for in the absence of revelation there would be no lived experience of the divine in the present and hence no religion of which to speak. Rosenzweig's magnum opus is in a very precise sense a journey from death to life, and the midpoint of the path is revelation, for as the manifestation of God's love for humanity it is the victory over death. The texture of the revelatory experience is uniquely understood by Rosenzweig in terms of the nexus of love (*Liebe*) and death (*Tode*), which illumines and is illuminated by the refractive structure of the parable (*Gleichnis*). The overcoming of death by love, linked exegetically to the verse "love is as strong as death" (*Song of Songs* 8:6), reflects the very structure of the parable, which in turn discloses something fundamental about the dialogical character of the root-word (*Stammwort*) that resounds in the "grammar of eros" or the "language of love". Viewed in

⁴⁴ SR, 382.

⁴⁵ From *Atheistische Theologie*, cited by Mendes-Flohr, Rosenzweig (n. 25), 144.

⁴⁶ See, however, Rosenzweig's comment in his notes to Halevi's poem, which he translates as *Der Helfer*, in Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 212: "For in the depth of despair nothing more than the creature remains of man, and thus it is indeed the Creator alone with whom he can learn anew to believe in the Revealer and to hope for the Redeemer."

⁴⁷ SR, 316.

⁴⁸ Rosenzweig employs this term in *Das neue Denken*, in: *Kleinere Schriften* (n. 41), 379; English translation in Nahum N. Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig. *His Life and Thought*, New York (Schocken Books) 1953, 192. On Rosenzweig's notion of "experiencing philosophy", see Reiner Wiehl, Experience in Rosenzweig's New Thinking, in: *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 42–68.

this way it may not be an exaggeration to say that the *Star* is essentially a philosophical midrash on the aforementioned words of Scripture.⁴⁹

In the final analysis, for Rosenzweig, the metahistorical reference that renders history meaningful is not simply revelation but that which revelation foretells in the form of redemption. Rosenzweig insists that the eschaton, the end that lies beyond history, ultimately makes temporal life significant and meaningful. "To escape the power of the past, to transcend the law which constitutes causation, the moment must, at each instant, be reborn. This continuous renewal and resumption of the present is a contribution of the future. The future is the inexhaustible well from which moments are drawn. ... At each moment the future presents to man the gift of being present to himself".⁵⁰ Still, revelation remains the crucial theological category, for it is only through revelation, an expression of God's love for humanity, that the realm beyond history comes into contact with that which is within history. That revelation, God's love, is the central category in Rosenzweig's theology is obvious from the fact that God as creator and God as redeemer are known to the human being only through God as revealer. "Creator and Redeemer we recognize in this way only after their connection in revelation. We catch sight of the Creator and the Redeemer only from the vantage point of the God of love. We can see what has been and what is to be only to the extent that the flicker of the moment of divine love shines".⁵¹

Expressed in terms of the categories of temporality: we know past and future only through the present. Precisely this possibility of renewed revelation prevents Scripture, which contains the word of God, from becoming merely a literary artifact (*Schrift*). "God is *present*, and if he acts through messengers, they are not postmen bringing yesterday's news ... rather in this moment of theirs God is what acts immediately in them

⁴⁹ My formulation here is indebted to Michael Fishbane, *Speech and Scripture. The Grammatical Thinking and Theology of Franz Rosenzweig*, in: *The Garments of Torah. Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press), 1989, 146 n. 34. Fishbane remarks that *The Star of Redemption* may be considered in some respects a "philosophical midrash" on a cluster of verses in *Song of Songs* 8. Of these verse 6, "for love is as strong as death", is clearly the most important as it encapsulates the very purpose of the book as a whole. See Fishbane, 102 and 105. On the centrality of *Song of Songs* in Rosenzweig's thought, see also Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 22), 346, 355–356, 416, 453–454. Rosenzweig's reading of *Song of Songs* has also been studied against the background of Jewish mysticism by Yudit Kornberg-Greenberg, *A Jewish Postmodern Critique of Rosenzweig's Speech Thinking and the Concept of Revelation*, in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, 1992, 71–73, and in an expanded version in the chapter *Revelation. Speech and the Sensuality of Love*, in her forthcoming monograph on Rosenzweig's thought, *Better Than Wine. Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig*.

⁵⁰ Rosenzweig, *Understanding* (n. 3), 69–70.

⁵¹ SR, 381–382.

and speaks immediately through them".⁵² What is important, then, is the oral recitation of the written text, for by being read aloud the divinely revealed word comes alive: "The bond of the tongue must be loosed by the eye. We must free from beneath the logical punctuation that is sometimes its ally and sometimes its foe the fundamental principle of natural, oral punctuation: the act of breathing".⁵³ The privileging of performative speech over the written text underscores the essential link of revelation and the present. Only by hearing the word of God is the temporal present infused with metahistorical significance. For Rosenzweig, therefore, Offenbarungsglaube represented the only tenable response to the crisis of historicism.⁵⁴

*Noch nicht:
Temporal Deferment and the Eternality of the Future*

The Kingdom of God (das Reich Gottes), according to Rosenzweig, is not achieved as the result of natural progress (Fortschritt), as the philosophers of the Enlightenment maintained. In the course of time,⁵⁵ Rosenzweig came to reject the Hegelian notion that history was the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit: "Why should we be in need of God if history were God-like, if every deed, once it entered history, became *ipso facto* God-like and justifiable?"⁵⁶ Rosenzweig argued, to the contrary, that

⁵² Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Word. On the New Bible Translation*, in: *Scripture and Translation*. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, translated by Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox, Bloomington (Indiana University Press) 1994, 42.

⁵³ Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Word* (n. 52).

⁵⁴ See Alexander Altmann, *About the Correspondence*, in: *Judaism* (n. 26), 32–33.

⁵⁵ See Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 48), xiii–xiv. For Rosenzweig's critique of and indebtedness to Hegel, see Stéphane Mosès, *Hegel beim Wort genommen. Geschichtskritik bei Franz Rosenzweig*, in: *Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig*, edited by Gotthard Fuchs and Hans Hermann Henrix, Frankfurt am Main (Verlag Josef Knecht) 1987, 67–89, and in the same volume, Heinz-Jürgen Göritz, *Der Tod als Krisis geschichtlicher Synthese. Der Begriff der Erfahrung bei Hegel und Rosenzweig*, 91–126. See also Göritz, *Tod und Erfahrung. Rosenzweigs 'erfahrende Philosophie' und Hegels 'Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins'*, Düsseldorf (Patmos Verlag) 1984; Shlomo Avineri, *Rosenzweig's Hegel Interpretation. Its Relationship to the Development of His Jewish Thinking*, in: *Schmied-Kowarzik, Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 10), 831–838, and in the same volume, Otto Pöggeler, *Rosenzweig und Hegel*, 839–853; Pöggeler, *Between Enlightenment and Romanticism. Rosenzweig and Hegel*, in: *Mendes-Flohr, The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 107–123; Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 30–33, 37–39; Heinz-Jürgen Göritz, *La refondation du 'principe dialectique' chez Hegel et chez Rosenzweig*, in: *La pensée de Franz Rosenzweig. Actes du Colloque parisien organisé à l'occasion du centenaire de la naissance du philosophe*, Paris (Presses Universitaires de France) 1994, 95–122; and in the same volume the essay by Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Le tout, le linéaire et l'impersonnel. Formes figées d'un hégélianisme haïssable*, 123–136. See below, n. 153.

⁵⁶ *Briefe*, 50, cited by Altmann, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 29), 206.

“every human deed is liable to become sinful precisely after it has entered history and has become part of it, since through the interrelation of acts in history no act is merely personal but is caught up in an impersonal nexus of cause and effect beyond the control and intention of the doer. For this reason God must redeem man not through history but – there is no alternative – through religion”.⁵⁷ The category “religious” is never to be identified with the category “historical”. Accordingly, Rosenzweig rejects those who conceive of the Kingdom as a result of a linear progress in time.⁵⁸

Apart from this consideration, Rosenzweig rejects the notion of progress because such a notion entails the impossibility of ever reaching the future. We can see this most clearly in Hermann Cohen’s idea of the asymptotic future. For Cohen, the messianic idea of redemption represented the ethical ideal of human perfection. “Eternity”, writes Cohen, is “an ethical concept”, the “eternity of the progress of moral endeavor”, “the orientation for the restless, infinite striving of the pure will”.⁵⁹ Insofar as it is the ideal, however, it can never be fully attained: As we approach the future, it recedes from us – its very nature as ideal precludes the possibility of its being achieved. The messianic future thus serves as a regulative idea (in the Kantian sense): “eternity means the eternal task, the task of eternity”.⁶⁰ Rosenzweig criticizes this view: “Were the kingdom only to grow, with mute insensate, compulsive propulsion, ever progressing, progressively further into the endlessness of time, with no end ahead of it outside of endlessness, then indeed the act would be lame. Then the ultimate would be endlessly far away, and therefore the proximate, and the neighbor, also inaccessible”.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Briefe, 51, cited by Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 207. See Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *Relativism* (n. 25), 173.

⁵⁸ See Rosenzweig’s remark in Jehuda Halevi. *Zweiundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte*, Berlin (Verlag Lambert Schneider) 1927, 239, cited in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 351; and Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, 594, cited in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 358. See also Gibbs, *Correlations* (n. 2), 111–112.

⁵⁹ Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, as cited by Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig on History (n. 29), 207.

⁶⁰ *Ethik des reinen Willens*. Cf. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, translated by Simon Kaplan, New York (Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.) 1972, 249: “The ideality of the Messiah, his significance as an idea, is shown in the overcoming of the person of the Messiah and in the dissolution of the personal image in the pure notion of time, in the concept of the *age*. Time becomes future and only future. Past and present submerge in this time of the future. This return to time is the purest idealization. All existence sinks into insignificance in the presence of the point of view of this idea, and man’s existence is preserved and elevated into the being of the future”. See also, 289–290.

⁶¹ SR, 228. For Rosenzweig’s critique of Cohen, see the telling anecdote regarding Cohen that Rosenzweig recounts in his note to Halevi’s poem, which he translates as *Die frohe Botschaft*, in: Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 259–260, already cited in: Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 351. See also the evidence adduced by Harold M. Stahmer, Franz

Ranke had asserted that "every age is really immediate to God". Rosenzweig understands this claim to be the epitomization of the idea of progress that emerged from the rationalist, secular ethics of the Enlightenment: No age is closer to the eschaton, all are equally close and hence equally distant from the end. Rosenzweig concludes that the idea of progress "discloses its real nature soon enough through the concept of endlessness. Even if there is talk of 'eternal' progress — in truth it is but 'interminable' progress that is meant. It is a progress which progresses permanently on its way, where every moment has the guaranteed assurance that its turn will yet come, where it can thus be as certain of its coming into existence as a transpired moment of its already being-in-existence. Thus the real idea of progress resists nothing so strongly as the possibility that the 'ideal goal' could and should be reached, perhaps in the next moment, or even this very moment".⁶²

The concept of eternity (Ewigkeit) and that of endlessness (Unendlichkeit) must be distinguished; those who believe in the Kingdom affirm the former, whereas those who teach progress affirm the latter. Endlessness implies that the future is that which can never come: Every future is a present that in its time will be superseded by another present, and so on ad infinitum. Eternity, on the other hand, not only implies that the future is a real possibility but that it is a real possibility at any moment. "For the future is first and foremost a matter of anticipating, that is, the end must be expected at every moment. Only thus does the future become the time of eternity".⁶³ Eternal, therefore, is not synonymous with endless. The endless is that which can never be; the eternal, on the contrary, is "that which is expected with every next moment"; "every moment must be prepared to assume the fullness of eternity".⁶⁴ "Eternity is not a very long time; it is a Tomorrow that could as well be Today".⁶⁵

It is, moreover, the prolepsis of the future in the present that "eternalizes" or sustains the present. "Every moment can be the last. That is

Rosenzweig's Letters to Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy, 1917–1922, in: Leo Baeck Year Book 34, 1989, 400–402. See, however, Steven S. Schwarzschild, Franz Rosenzweig's Anecdotes about Hermann Cohen, in: Gegenwart im Rückblick. Festgabe für die jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin 25 Jahre nach dem Neubeginn, Heidelberg (Lothar Stiehm Verlag) 1970, 209–218. On the contrasting views of Cohen and Rosenzweig regarding the nature of time, history, and the messianic future, see William Kluback, Time and History. The Conflict Between Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, in: Schmied-Kowarzik, Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (n. 10), 801–813. In spite of Rosenzweig's criticism of Cohen, he was greatly influenced by him, particularly with respect to the idea of correlation. See Mosès, Revelation (n. 10), 45–49; Gibbs, Correlation (n. 2), 17–23.

⁶² SR, 227.

⁶³ SR, 226.

⁶⁴ SR, 228. Cf. Rosenzweig, Briefe, 594, cited in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 358: "The eternity we Jews speak of is not located in infinity, but 'in a time soon to come, in our days'."

⁶⁵ SR, 224.

what makes it eternal and that, precisely, makes it the origin of the future as a sequence every member of which is anticipated by the first. That the kingdom is 'among you', that it is coming 'today', is a notion of the future which eternalizes (i.e. sustains) the moment (*Verewigung des Augenblicks*).⁶⁶ Without the anticipated future the moment would "vanish with the speed of an arrow".⁶⁷ The moment stands only insofar as it anticipates the future. In this sense, the eschaton has already been realized in the present. "Eternity is just this: that time no longer has a right to a place between the present moment and consummation and that the whole future is to be grasped today".⁶⁸ For Rosenzweig, the future, as Alexander Altmann observed, "ceases to be an historical category. It no longer denotes a time to come but the Kingdom to come".⁶⁹ "In the strict sense", writes Rosenzweig, "there is in fact no history of the kingdom of God. The eternal can have no history".⁷⁰ Yet, the future is future only to the extent that it is not yet present. The Kingdom, Rosenzweig tells us, "is not yet (*noch nicht*)⁷¹ in existence once and for all. It is eternally coming (*Es kommt ewig*)."⁷² In this sense, the eschaton has not been realized in the present but is what shall be. "Today completes itself into a Tomorrow and a day after Tomorrow".⁷³

Rosenzweig's conception of the eternity of the Kingdom implies, to use Altmann's language, the paradox of presentness and future: "it is both presentness, the 'eternalizing of the moment' and future, being 'eternally on its way'".⁷⁴ Eschatology, therefore, "points to the future only

⁶⁶ SR, 226. Rosenzweig quite intentionally makes use here of the language of the Gospels; cf. Matt 10:17, Mk 1:15.

⁶⁷ SR, 337.

⁶⁸ SR, 328.

⁶⁹ Altmann, Rosenzweig (n. 29), 208.

⁷⁰ SR, 353.

⁷¹ Interestingly, Rosenzweig used the same expression *noch nicht* when someone asked him if he fulfilled the commandment of wearing phylacteries during the morning prayers. See Samuel Hugo Bergman, *Faith and Reason. An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*, translated and edited by Alfred Jospe, New York (Schocken Books) 1963, 77. The condition of "not yet" is essential to religious faith, for the sense of deferment endows the future with the genuine possibility of becoming a present, a novel and unprecedented experience, which is the character of revelation. The term *noch nicht* occupies a central place in Heidegger's phenomenology as well, for he uses that expression to convey the idea that *Dasein* is existentially the potentiality-for Being, that which is not yet, the possibility that is still outstanding. See Heidegger, *Being and Time* (n. 15), 185–186, 286–290, 293, 303, 365; Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (n. 15), 16.

⁷² SR, 224.

⁷³ SR, 282. It would be instructive to compare Rosenzweig's conception of the messianic future to the remark of Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, New York (Schocken Books) 1971, 81: "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last".

⁷⁴ Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 208.

in so far as it is realized in the present".⁷⁵ That Rosenzweig embraces the paradoxical is clear from his description of the Kingdom as "always yet to come – but to come it is always. It is always already in existence and at the same time still to come ... Eternity is a future which, without ceasing to be future is nonetheless present. Eternity is a Today which is, however, conscious of being more than Today".⁷⁶ Both the dimension of presentness and that of future are integral to Rosenzweig's eschatology. The former, eternity already realized in the midst of time, is designated as the eternal life (*ewiges Leben*), while the latter, the still as yet unfulfilled struggle to realize the end, is designated as the eternal way (*ewiger Weg*). Without the one we could not have the other: "There is eternal life only in contrast to the life of those who pave the eternal way, which is always exclusively temporal".⁷⁷ The bearer of the eternal life is the Synagogue, the guardian of the eternal way the Church. Jew and Christian "are within the same frontier, in the same Kingdom".⁷⁸ "Before God, then, Jew and Christian both labor at the same task. He cannot dispense with either".⁷⁹ For the human being truth is only partial; eternal Truth, however, the All-in-All, is a synthesis of the eternal manifestations (*Gestalten*) of life and way, rest and motion, destiny and deed. The star of redemption is composed of both the unchanging fire and its flickering rays.

*Metahistory, Myth,
and the Eschatological Introversion of Time*

According to Rosenzweig, the temporality of history is rendered meaningful only by the eternity of the metahistorical. If time is to be fulfilled by eternity, however, it is necessary that the future be anticipated in the present. The eschaton, the "end of days", is not the denouement of a natural or logical progression. Indeed, for Rosenzweig, an ontological gap separates the historical present from the messianic future – a gap that is bridged only by the anticipation of the Kingdom. This anticipation offers humanity hope, the being of which is tied up uniquely to the exis-

⁷⁵ Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 209. See also Stéphane Mosès, *Von der Zeit zur Ewigkeit. Erlösung – eine problematische Kategorie bei Franz Rosenzweig*, in: *Zeitgewinn* (n. 55), 151–162.

⁷⁶ SR, 224.

⁷⁷ SR, 380.

⁷⁸ *Judaism* (n. 26), 130. See Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), xxv–xxvi.

⁷⁹ SR, 415. See *Judentum und Christentum nach Franz Rosenzweig: Ein Gespräch*, in: *Zeitgewinn* (n. 55), 163–183; Ignaz Maybaum, *Dialogue Between Jew, Christian, and Muslim*, London (Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1973, 43–131; Ronald H. Miller, *Dialogue and Disagreement. Franz's Rosenzweig's Relevance to Contemporary Jewish-Christian Understanding*, Lanham (University Press of America) 1989.

tence of the Jewish people. "Hope lives as a matter of blood-inheritance only in Jewish blood".⁸⁰ The Jews are the source of hope for they dwell proleptically in the eschaton; they are the "eternal people", for them "eternity has already come – even in the midst of time".⁸¹ Israel is the eschatological reference in history, "the people at the goal". "It lives in its own redemption. It has anticipated eternity".⁸² Through the circularity of sacred time, manifest in the liturgical and ritualistic calendar, Israel is able to effect an inversion of the chronological sequence such that the end of redemption is the beginning of creation and the beginning of creation is the end of redemption. Sabbath is the perfect symbol to embody this inversion of time insofar as it signifies concurrently creation and redemption. "The Sabbath is the feast of creation, but of a creation wrought for the sake of redemption. ... That is why we do not celebrate the festival of the primordial work of creation on the first day of creation, but on its last, the seventh day".⁸³ Particularly the third and final meal of the Sabbath, when the "old men and children gather around the long table in the light of the waning day" and sing songs that "reel with the transport of certainty that the Messiah will come and will come soon",⁸⁴ expresses the profound paradoxical truth of the Sabbath worthy of kabbalistic hermeneutics: It is the beginning that is the end and the end that is the beginning. "For its eternal life constantly anticipates the end and thus turns it into beginning. In this inversion, it denies time as decisively as possible and places itself outside of time. To live in time means to live between beginning and end. He who would live an eternal life ... must live outside of time, and he who would do this must deny the 'between'. ... To invert a Between means to make its After a Before, its Before an After, the end a beginning, the beginning an end. And that is what the eternal people does. It already lives its own life as if it were all the world and the world were finished. In its Sabbaths it celebrates the sabbatical

⁸⁰ SR, 285. The centrality of hope, which is linked to the anticipation of the eschatological future, as an existential category was further developed by Ernst Bloch. According to Bloch, the very essence of being human is to be hopeful. See Paul Mendes-Flohr, 'To Brush History Against the Grain' – The Eschatology of the Frankfurt School and Ernst Bloch, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, 1983, 631–650. Mendes-Flohr describes Bloch's view in the following words: "Hope probes the future and thereby illuminates the possibilities of the present; hope tells us that our present existence is not ultimate and that there is an alternative. Hope permits us to transcend the painful present by anticipating a utopian future – a kind of reality that has never been', but nonetheless it is a vision of a possibility that might be realized". Bloch's emphasis on hope bears a striking resemblance to Rosenzweig's eschatology: The Jews impart direction to history for they proleptically reside in the eschaton beyond history.

⁸¹ SR, 332.

⁸² SR, 328.

⁸³ SR, 315.

⁸⁴ SR, 313.

completion of the world and makes it the foundation and starting point of its existence."⁸⁵

In order for Israel to assume this eschatological status, therefore, it was necessary for it to be withdrawn from history. As a people rooted in eternity the Jews cannot partake in the national and political struggles unfolding in historical time: "The Jewish people has already reached the goal toward which the nations are still moving. It has that inner unity of faith and life ... is still no more than a dream to the nations within the Church. But just because it has that unity, the Jewish people is bound to be outside the world that does not yet have it. Though living in a state of eternal peace, it is outside of time agitated by wars. Insofar as it has reached the goal which it anticipates in hope, it cannot belong to the procession of those who approach this goal through the work of centuries. Its soul, replete with the vistas afforded by hope, grows numb to the concerns, the doing, and the struggling of the world."⁸⁶ In support of his interpretation, Rosenzweig relies on the unique role that Galut, "exile", has played in the history of the Jewish people. Indeed, as Rosenzweig perceptively notes, the incipient episode of Israelite history (from the vantage point of Scripture) begins with God's commandment to Abram to leave his native land and to go to the land that will be shown to him. But even this land of promise does not belong exclusively to Abram, for the Bible records, "The Canaanites were then in the land" (Gen 12:6). Commenting on this verse, Rosenzweig writes that "exile stands at the outset of this history".⁸⁷ The very first commandment already alludes to Israel's unique role in the world: the nation that lives in but yet out of history.

Rosenzweig intuits a profound irony in the biblical text, which informs the nature of Jewish faith through the ages. On the one hand, the destiny and fate of the Jewish people is tied intrinsically to the land of Israel. The land provides the metaphysical and not merely the geographical boundaries of the nation. But the physical space of the land originally belongs to another, which indicates that the bond between people and land derives its legitimacy and validity only from the fact that God commanded Abram to leave his homeland to enter this land. The physical displacement of Abram will foster a political and military dispute over who will come to own the land physically, the Israelites or the Canaanites. In the end, however, spiritual ownership results from the covenantal

⁸⁵ SR, 420.

⁸⁶ SR, 331–332. See Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), xxi–xxii; Arthur Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew. An Historical and Theological Introduction*, New York (Pantheon Books) 1962, 141–143.

⁸⁷ Naharayim (n. 43), 65. One might conjecture that Rosenzweig would have considered the epithet "wandering Jew" as the highest praise. The Jew is indeed homeless in this world, for his true home is in the eternal kingdom, which is more of a temporal than a spatial entity.

relationship to God, a response to the commandments, which are the living word of faith that provide an occasion for God to reveal his presence.⁸⁸ The messianic task is imparted to the Jew from the commanding word of God that creates rupture, displacement, homelessness, a breach in the surface of history that allows for the metahistorical myth to manifest itself in the drama of Israel's Heilsgeschichte. Reaffirming the nexus of exile and messianism, Rosenzweig asserts that Israel's stateless condition since the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple signifies not rejection but rather election. "Chosen by its Father, the people of Israel gazes fixedly across the world and history, over to that last, most distant time when the Father, the One and Only, will be 'all in all'".⁸⁹ Israel's aloofness from history, as it were, allows it to anticipate the Kingdom, which, in truth, is the goal of history. "The synagogue, which is immortal but stands with broken staff and bound eyes, must renounce all work in this world, and muster all her strength to preserve her life and keep herself untainted by life. ... Herein the synagogue gazes fixedly into the future".⁹⁰ In a profound reversal of the standard medieval representation of the Synagogue as the blindfolded maiden holding the broken staff, these ostensibly negative images signify the unique eschatological function of Judaism as the religion that is beyond history. Blind to the historical present, Judaism alone casts its gaze into the metahistorical future. What appears as blindness from the perspective of time is genuine insight from the perspective of eternity.

In one of his letters to Rosenstock-Huessy,⁹¹ Rosenzweig refers to the rabbinic legend regarding the birth of the Messiah at the exact moment that the Temple was destroyed.⁹² This aggadic tradition accords

⁸⁸ See Paul Mendes-Flohr, Rosenzweig and Kant: Two Views of Ritual and Religion, in: *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians. Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, edited by Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski, with the collaboration of Kalman P. Bland, Durham (Duke University Press) 1982, 315–341; Mendes-Flohr, *Law and Sacrament: Ritual Observance in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought*, in: *Jewish Spirituality. From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, 317–345, esp. 326–334; and in the same volume the study by Rivka Horwitz, *Revelation* (n. 10), 346–370.

⁸⁹ From a letter written by Rosenzweig to Rudolph Ehrenberg, cited by Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 48), 341–342.

⁹⁰ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 48), 342.

⁹¹ *Judaism* (n. 26), 112.

⁹² *Palestinian Talmud, Berakhot 2:4*. It is of interest to compare Gershom Scholem's gloss of the rabbinic legend concerning the birth of the Messiah on the day of the destruction of the Temple, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York (Schocken) 1971, 11: "Beginning at the moment of the deepest catastrophe there exists the chance for redemption." Scholem's interpretation betrays his Zionist proclivity in contrast to Rosenzweig who interpreted the rabbinic legend as affirming the idea that messianic redemption is dialectically related to the withdrawal from history, emblemized by the destruction of the Temple.

perfectly with Rosenzweig's theological understanding: Israel receives its messianic mission, the task to fulfill history, at the precise moment that it is withdrawn from the historical arena.⁹³ To be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6) Israel could not be like other nations: "The consecration poured over it as over a priestly people renders its life 'unproductive'. Its holiness hinders it from devoting its soul to a still unhallowed world, no matter how much the body may be bound up with it. This people must deny itself active and full participation in the life of this world with its daily, apparently conclusive, solving of all contradictions. It is not permitted to recognize this daily solving of contradictions, for that would render it disloyal to the hope of a final solution."⁹⁴

Hence, the ambiguous nature of the Jew: he is, at once, in but out of this world. Israel has no more growth as a nation: "For we have long ago been robbed of all the things in which the peoples of the world are rooted. For us, land and language, custom and law, have long left the circle of the living and have been raised to the rung of holiness".⁹⁵ As holy these things are untouched by time. "The eternal people buys its eternity at the cost of its temporal life. Time is not its time, nor its acre and heritage".⁹⁶ To be sure, the holiness demanded of the Jewish people involves acts of consecration in time – indeed one of the basic divisions of rabbinic ritual is between those laws whose fulfillment is dependent on time and those that are not – but through the acts of consecration time is rendered meaningful to the degree that it is sustained by that which transcends time, the metahistorical point of reference.⁹⁷ It is through the liturgical patterns and performance of religious ritual that Israel expresses its eternity in time. "God withdrew the Jew from this life by arching the bridge of his law high above the current of time which henceforth and to all eternity rushes powerlessly along under its arches".⁹⁸ The dialectical relationship of time and eternity effected by Judaism's spiritual calendar is exemplified in Rosenzweig's observation that the Day of Atonement, which represents the climax of the Days of Awe in which the soul is transported from temporal life to eternity, is

⁹³ It should be noted that Hermann Cohen also established a nexus between Israel's loss of a national state and the messianic ideal. See Cohen, *Religion of Reason* (n. 60), 267.

⁹⁴ SR, 332.

⁹⁵ SR, 305.

⁹⁶ SR, 303.

⁹⁷ The point is underscored in Rosenzweig's account of holiness in his note to Halevi's poem, which he translates as *Heilig*, in Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 210: "It is the Holy One who sets Himself apart and who everywhere makes a setting apart, an unheard of thing, an election, a holiness. Without the revealed miracles of this today, the concealed miracles of everyday would be invisible, at least invisible as miracles. Only the revelation of things set apart teaches us to revere the Creator even in 'natural things'. Only the tremors of holiness sanctify the everyday of the profane."

⁹⁸ SR, 339.

followed by the Feast of Booths (Sukkot), "which is a feast of redemption founded on the base of an unredeemed era and of a people yet within the pale of history. ... To neutralize this foretaste of eternity, the Feast of Booths reinstates the reality of time. Thus the circuit of the year can recommence, for only within this circuit are we allowed to conjure eternity up into time".⁹⁰

What is from the Christian perspective "the stubbornness of the Jew", i. e., his unwillingness to accept Jesus as the Messiah, is from the Jewish perspective an expression of Israel's particular eschatological mission. The Jew must exist "despite Christianity", for he has accepted "the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven". This burden has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Subjectively, it is the cause of great anguish for the Jew remains alienated from the other nations of the world. Objectively, it is the symbol of Israel's uniqueness: the Jews dwell proleptically in the eschaton, the eternity beyond time that fulfills time. The liberation from time places Israel in the realm beyond time while still residing in time. Hence, Israel "alone regards as the present what, for other communities, is the future, or, at any rate, something outside the present. For it alone the future is not something alien but something of its own, something it carries in its womb and which might be born any day".¹⁰⁰ The Synagogue, therefore, represents the virtue of hope, which, according to Rosenzweig, is the virtue unique to the present and final phase of Christianity, viz., the Johannine era.¹⁰¹ Israel embodies the promise of eschatological fulfillment, the goal towards which all peoples aspire; it thus can anticipate the goal at any moment. It is this anticipation that gives an ontological status to the future and, thereby, is the source of hope for humanity. "Only the eternal people, which is not encompassed by world history, can – at every moment – bind creation as a whole to redemption while redemption is still to come".¹⁰² Rosenzweig emphasizes, moreover,

⁹⁹ SR, 328.

¹⁰⁰ SR, 299.

¹⁰¹ Rosenzweig accepted Schelling's division of Christianity into three ages of the world (Weltalter): the Petrine age of Roman Catholicism, the Pauline age of Protestantism, and the Johannine age of Spirit without dogma. To these three ages correspond respectively the virtues of love, faith, and hope. Insofar as the Jews are the bearers of hope, for they anticipate the end and true goal of history, they play a crucial role in this last age of Christianity. See SR, 279–285; Altman, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 199–200; Mosès, Revelation (n. 10), 39–45; Gibbs, Correlations (n. 2), 40–56.

¹⁰² SR, 335. Rosenzweig's influence on Rosenstock-Huussy can be clearly seen in the latter's *Out of Revolution. Autobiography of Western Man*, New York (William Morrow and Co.) 1938, 216–226. He writes: "The Jews represent the end of human history before its actual end: Without them pagan history would not only have no goal, but would have gotten nowhere". The Jewish community "was created above and beyond all human divisions. It reminds men in the hope beyond their daily hopes, of a more important step to come". Initially, Rosenstock-Huussy was highly critical of Rosenzweig's position. See Bergman, Faith (n. 71), 70–71.

that by virtue of its metahistorical messianic role Judaism succeeds in affirming the "unity of myth", which facilitates the welding together of the universal and the particular: "The Jew alone suffers no conflict between the supreme vision which is placed before his soul and the people among whom his life has placed him. ... The Jew's myth, leading him into his people, brings him face to face with God who is also the God of all nations. The Jewish people feels no conflict between what is its very own and what is supreme; the love it has for itself inevitably becomes love for its neighbor."¹⁰³

Rosenzweig thus reverses the standard theological viewpoint: The supposedly catholic Christian faith actually affirms a paganistic myth that fosters the retreat into a cultural particularism, whereas the presumably parochial Jewish piety embraces the universal God and the ideal of the love of all humanity. Israel is not, however, alone in its messianic duty. Rosenzweig attempted to forge a genuine partnership between Synagogue and Church. Judaism and Christianity are both authentic manifestations or configurations (*Gestalten*) of the one eternal truth, which, in its totality, is beyond both.¹⁰⁴ Judaism represents the "fire" or "eternal life" and Christianity the "rays" or the "eternal way". The Jew is the one already at the goal, the Christian the one who is eternally en route. While the Jew dwells proleptically in the Kingdom, the Christian is "with every moment midway between beginning and end of his course".¹⁰⁵ Neither form of truth is dispensable: "Both the eternal life and the eternal way have this in common: they are eternal".¹⁰⁶ Insofar as they are eternal, they perform a messianic task; yet, the nature of their tasks is radically different. Judaism, the eternal life, is like an infinite point: self-enclosed, at rest, complete in and of itself; Christianity, the eternal way, is like an infinite line: eternally extending itself, always restless, always in the middle, between beginning and end, never complete. Accordingly, it is the task of Christianity to spread its teachings, to proselytize, for it constitutes the "rays [that] shoot forth from the fiery nucleus of the Star".¹⁰⁷ The task of Christianity is to prepare the world for the coming Kingdom by preaching to the heathen nations the belief in monotheism. Christianity is thus the "Judaizing of the pagans".¹⁰⁸ While the Synagogue has been liberated from time, the Church must master time.

¹⁰³ SR, 329.

¹⁰⁴ See Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), xxv-xxvi; Bergman, Faith (n. 71), 62-69; Cohen, Jew (n. 86), 138-139.

¹⁰⁵ SR, 339.

¹⁰⁶ SR, 341.

¹⁰⁷ SR, 337. Cf. Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution* (n. 102), 221: "The true Christians ... are the rays sent out from this central fire, which actually transform the world. As coals in the heart of fire, the Jews are prisoners of God". Again, Rosenzweig's influence is indisputably clear.

¹⁰⁸ Judaism (n. 26), 112.

Although their messianic tasks are distinct, the Jew and Christian need one another. The Jew needs the Christian for the latter prepares the world for the Kingdom and thereby performs the "labor" of redemption. The Christian, on the other hand, needs the Jew to remind him of his true mission in the world. Since the Church is the "eternal way" it always runs the risk of succumbing to the power of those whom it must convert: the Christian is forever in conflict with the pagan. Christianity is always in danger of identifying completely with the *Zwischenreich*, the intermediate realm of time and history.¹⁰⁹ The Synagogue must remind the Church of its true purpose and task: to convert the pagans to monotheism. If all Jews were forced to convert to Christianity, the Christian would lose this distinctive identity as Christian and would soon relapse into paganism. The Jew, therefore, is the validation of the claim that the Christian is "in" yet not "of" this world (Jn 17:16). "For the Christian we are thus the really indubitable. ... Our existence stands surety for their truth. That is why, from the Christian point of view, it follows logically that Paul should let the Jews remain to the end – till 'the fullness of the peoples shall have come in' (Rom 11:25), that is, to that moment when the Son shall return the dominion to the Father. The theologism from the beginnings of Christian theology enunciates what we have here explained: that Judaism, by its eternal endurance through all time ... is the One Nucleus whose glow provides invisible nourishment to the rays which, in Christianity, burst visibly and divisibly into the night of the pagan proto- and hypercosmos."¹¹⁰ Striking a similar chord, Rosenzweig writes to Rosenstock-Huussy, "we are to you the ever-mindful memorial of your incompleteness (for you who live in a church triumphant need a mute servant who cries when you have partaken of God's bread and wine, 'Master remember the last things')".¹¹¹ The irony here is unmistakable: God's bread and wine represent not the body and blood of Jesus,¹¹² but rather the material goods of the world. The Jew is called the servant and the Christian is referred to as the master. In truth, however, the relation is reversed: the Jew is the master and the Christian the servant. The paradoxical nature of Rosenzweig's theological posture is underscored by his claim that the Jew cries out in his muteness to remind the Christian of his spiritual function. Just as the blindfolded Synagogue alone gazes upon the eternal future by means of its inner prophetic eye, so the muted Jew is the one who proclaims the implicit messianic task of Christianity. The

¹⁰⁹ Compare Rosenzweig's remarks in the letter to Ehrenberg cited in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 343.

¹¹⁰ SR, 415.

¹¹¹ Judaism (n. 26), 112.

¹¹² Matt 26:26–28; Mk 14:2–24; Lk 22:17–20.

Jew is the metahistorical reference within time that imparts meaning to history. Thus the task of the Synagogue is construed as “messianic politics”.¹¹³

Mystical Quietism and the Spiritualization of the Messianic Ideal

In his oft-cited and influential essay, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism”, Gershom Scholem suggests that an essential element of the Jewish messianic idea is the catastrophe: “Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature – this cannot be sufficiently emphasized – a theory of catastrophe. This theory stresses the revolutionary, cataclysmic element in the transition from every historical present to the Messianic future”.¹¹⁴ One thing that follows from this notion of catastrophe is that the transition from the historical present to the eschatological future is not a natural or logical progression. The catastrophic nature of redemption entails that the advent of the redeemer is unforeseeable and incalculable. The notion of catastrophic redemption is, as Scholem remarks, “paradoxical” for it implies, on the one hand, that the “redemption which is born here is in no causal sense a result of previous history”.¹¹⁵ Yet, on the other hand, it follows from the fact that the messianic future is not causally linked to the present that it may erupt at any and every moment. Hence, the eschaton is unforeseeable but always possible, indeed imminent.¹¹⁶

Scholem notes, moreover, that this catastrophic notion stands in sharp contrast to the secular messianism that developed in Western thought since the Enlightenment. Philosophers of the Enlightenment argued for the rational perfectibility of humanity and the natural progression of history toward the ethically ideal society.¹¹⁷ The Messiah became identified with the moral ideal immanent in history itself. Accordingly, the fulfillment of history was both foreseeable and calculable. Furthermore, the eschaton was not conceived as a genuine possibility at any moment but rather as the climax of the historical process. Scholem argues that the traditional prophetic/apocalyptic idea of messianism,

¹¹³ SR, 328.

¹¹⁴ Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92), 7.

¹¹⁵ Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 10.

¹¹⁶ That the end is unforeseeable is expressed in the rabbinic passage (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a): “Three things come unawares: the Messiah, a found article, and a scorpion”. That it is always imminent is stated in Midrash Tehilim to Ps 45:3: “If Israel would repent even for a single day, they would be instantly redeemed and the Son of David would instantly come, for it says, ‘Today if you will listen to His voice’ (Ps 95:7)”.

¹¹⁷ See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1951, 234–274.

based as it is on the notion of "transcendence breaking in upon history, an intrusion in which history itself perishes, transformed by a beam of light shining into it from an outside source," denies any transition between the historical present and the future redemption and thus it is at odds with this modern formulation.¹¹⁸

It should be obvious in what sense this description is appropriate to Rosenzweig's eschatology. The eschaton is anticipated by the Jewish people, for they have been withdrawn from history, i. e., they proleptically dwell at the end in eternity. Indeed, eschatology in its absolute sense falls outside of history: "In the strict sense," writes Rosenzweig, "there is in fact no history of the kingdom of God. The eternal can have no history".¹¹⁹ Redemption, as revelation, is a "pouring forth of a superior content into an unworthy vessel",¹²⁰ or, to use Scholem's locution, it is an intrusion rather than an evolution. Moreover, as I have already noted, Rosenzweig rejects the progressive interpretation of history. From Rosenzweig's perspective, the rationalist concept of progress transforms the notion of eternity into endlessness. The latter precludes the possibility of the future ever coming for as we approach the endless it withdraws. The former, on the contrary, necessitates the possibility of the future erupting at any moment. "The future is first and foremost a matter of anticipating, that is, the end must be expected at every moment. Only thus does the future become the time of eternity".¹²¹ Insofar as the end may come at any moment, it cannot be calculated beforehand. "If then the kingdom is eternally coming, this means that, while its growth is essential, the tempo of this growth has no relationship at all to time. ... Life presses toward the world in a dark growth which defies all calculation".¹²² Redemption is thus always possible yet never foreseeable.

In spite of the obvious similarities between what Scholem presents as an authentic Jewish view and that of Rosenzweig, in his address "Zur Neuauflage des *Stern der Erlösung*", Scholem argued that, by his "doctrine of the anticipation of redemption in Jewish life", Rosenzweig "opposed the theory of catastrophes contained in Messianic apocalypticism".¹²³ According to Scholem, Rosenzweig belongs to the longstanding rationalistic tradition in Judaism that has attempted through the generations to "neutralize" the catastrophic element of prophetic-apocalyptic messianism. "The deepseated tendency to remove the apocalyptic thorn from the organism of Judaism makes Rosenzweig the last and certainly

¹¹⁸ Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92), 10.

¹¹⁹ SR, 353.

¹²⁰ See citation above at n. 36.

¹²¹ SR, 226.

¹²² SR, 224–227.

¹²³ Translated in Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92), 323.

one of the most vigorous exponents of a very old and very powerful movement in Judaism, which crystallized in a variety of forms".¹²⁴ The motivation underlying this tendency, Scholem goes on to note, was a deep concern for structure and order to which, in the final analysis, Rosenzweig too succumbed.

Although in the same essay Scholem does credit Rosenzweig for attempting a renewal in Jewish theology, even an effort to move from "reason to theistic mysticism" by lending support to "strictly mystical theologoumena" and by constructing a symbolic world of "mystical astronomy",¹²⁵ he maintains that, in the end, Rosenzweig desired to neutralize the "destructive" power of redemption. It seems to me, however, that Scholem has misrepresented Rosenzweig's conception of anticipation, a correct reading of which places him squarely within the apocalyptic tradition. The fact that the eschaton can be anticipated implies, for Rosenzweig, the concomitant fact that it may come at any moment. The redemption may be entreated or coerced, but it cannot be calculated or foreseen. In his notes to one of Judah Halevi's poems, which he translates as *Heilsrechnung*, "The Calculation of Salvation", Rosenzweig remarks: "Thus is the appointed time of redemption calculated. Again and again. And yet every calculation collapses, so that it is already said in the Tal-

¹²⁴ Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92).

¹²⁵ Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 322–323. In another study, Franz Rosenzweig and His Book *The Star of Redemption*, in: Mendes-Flohr, *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 35, Scholem notes the affinity between Rosenzweig and the kabbalah with respect to the creative nature of language as well as to the central role accorded revelatory experience in the theory of knowledge. The kabbalistic dimension of Rosenzweig's understanding of language was also noted by Jürgen Habermas, *Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen*, in: *Porträts zur deutsch-jüdischen Geistesgeschichte*, edited by Thilo Koch, Cologne, 1961, 103, cited by Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 289–290. See also Handelman, *Fragments* (n. 17), 93–94. The affinity of Rosenzweig's thought to kabbalistic theosophy has been noted by several other scholars as well. See Nahum Glatzer, *Essays in Jewish Thought*, University, Alabama (University of Alabama Press) 1978, 238; Moshe Idel, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbalah*, in: Mendes-Flohr, *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 162–171; Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 267–269, 279–281; Cohen, *Elevations* (n. 2), 241–273; Eveline Goodman-Thau, *Kabbala und Neues Denken. Zur Veranschaulichung und Tradierbarkeit des mythologischen Gedächtnisses*, in: *Messianismus zwischen Mythos und Macht. Jüdisches Denken in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, edited by Eveline Goodman-Thau und Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, Berlin (Akademie Verlag) 1994, 101–126, and in the same volume the study of Karl Erich Grözinger, *In Rosenzweigs Seele – die Kabbala*, 127–139. See also the studies of Kornberg-Greenberg cited above (n. 49). An important source for Rosenzweig's knowledge of kabbalistic motifs was the orthodox rabbi, Nehemiah Anton Nobel, with whom Rosenzweig had close relations and for whom he even translated into German the kabbalistic hymn, *Lekhah Dodi*, written in the sixteenth century by Solomon Alkabets. See evidence adduced by Rivka Horwitz, *Franz Rosenzweig – On Jewish Education*, in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, 1993, 212–214.

mud,¹²⁶ all appointed times have passed, and there remains only the power of return".¹²⁷ Following the talmudic tradition, Rosenzweig renounces the practice of calculating the time of the messianic age and insists that the arrival of the Messiah is dependent on human action, specifically the act of repentance or return (*teshuvah*). It must be pointed out, however, that Rosenzweig does not entertain the possibility of predicting the coming of the Messiah based on the good deeds of humanity. He eschews any causal link between the present and the future because the end erupts, it does not evolve. Again, to quote from Rosenzweig's notes to another one of Halevi's poems, translated as *Die frohe Botschaft*, "The Happy Message": "For the expectation of the Messiah, by which and for the sake of which Judaism lives, would be an empty theologoumenon, a mere 'idea', idle babble, — if it were not over and over again made real and unreal, illusion and disillusion in the form of 'the false Messiah'. The false Messiah is as old as the hope of the genuine one. ... Every Jewish generation is divided by him into those who have the strength of faith to be deceived, and those who have the strength of hope not to be deceived. ... Until the one time when it will be the reverse, and the faith of the faithful becomes the truth, and the hope of the hoping becomes the lie. Then — and no one knows whether this 'then' will not happen even today — then the task of those who hope comes to an end, and the one who still belongs to the hopeful and not to the faithful when the morning of that day breaks, risks the danger of being rejected".¹²⁸

Rosenzweig thus safeguards the catastrophic potential of Jewish messianism for the eruption of the eschaton is disruptive of the present historical order. Commenting on Halevi's poem, which he renders as *Im Heiligtum*, "In the Sanctuary", Rosenzweig writes: "And such a radical change, *the* radical change, is the messianic time, which to be sure puts an end to the hell of world history, but also to its ambiguities and apparent dearth of responsibilities".¹²⁹ That the Jew anticipates the future, that he proleptically resides in the end, means only that the future is an ontologically real possibility, i. e., that the future as future is present at every moment,¹³⁰ but it does not mean that the present is causally linked to the future. There is an aspect of that future that is not yet fully present, and the fullness of eternity is not something that is achieved through time and effort. The dimension of eternity breaks into time, perhaps destruc-

¹²⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97b.

¹²⁷ Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 260.

¹²⁸ Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 259, cited in a different translation in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 48), 350–351.

¹²⁹ Galli, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 22), 262, cited in a different translation in Glatzer, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 352.

¹³⁰ SR, 265–267, 288. See Altmann, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 29), 208.

tively, in the redemptive moment just as God breaks in at creation and revelation.

The disruptive quality of redemption to which Rosenzweig refers is already operative in his understanding of revelation. The true depth of the revelatory encounter (even as it is described in the *Star*) is that it is a totally unpredictable and unforeseeable experience. Rosenzweig's theological posture is based on what he called an "absolute empiricism".¹³¹ The logical and existential implications of his thinking are drawn explicitly in a remarkable passage that he wrote in his diary in response to a letter he received from Rudolf Hallo in January 1922: "Revelation has only this function: to make the world unreligious again".¹³² As Stéphane Mosès has noted, in this seemingly paradoxical statement Rosenzweig actually affirms the view that in its most elemental form revelation transcends the symbols, structures, rituals, and beliefs of any institutionalized religion.¹³³ Rosenzweig applied the same sense of the uncanny to redemption, a factor that places his doctrine of the anticipation of the Kingdom in its apocalyptic background, a point that Scholem failed to comprehend.¹³⁴

The critical problem with Rosenzweig's eschatology from the perspective of traditional Jewish sources concerns another characteristic of Jewish messianism discussed by Scholem. The latter has noted that, in addition to the catastrophic-apocalyptic element, the two tendencies that best characterize Jewish messianism are the restorative and the utopian: the dual force to return and to recreate the ideal past, on the one hand, and to create something new that has never yet existed, on the other.¹³⁵ The restorative and utopian elements point to an ideal past and future,

¹³¹ *Kleinere Schriften* (n. 41) 398. For an analysis of Rosenzweig's thought against the background of the trend called "empirical philosophy", see Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times. From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig*, New York (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) 1968, 174–218.

¹³² Cited in Stéphane Mosès, *Franz Rosenzweig in Perspective. Reflections on His Last Diaries*, in: Mendes-Flohr, *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 13), 187.

¹³³ Mosès, *Franz Rosenzweig, 187–191* (n. 132). While I agree with and have profited from Mosès' interpretation, I do not accept his conclusion that Rosenzweig's diary remarks are fundamentally different from the position he articulated in the *Star*.

¹³⁴ What is most remarkable is that Scholem's own understanding of mystical experience, which in his thinking assumes the place and function of revelation in Rosenzweig, bears a striking phenomenological resemblance to Rosenzweig's idea of the revelatory experience. That is, for Scholem as well, at the core the experience of the mystic's encounter with the numinous presence is indistinct, inarticulate, and formless. The experience, therefore, is potentially at odds with the institutionalized forms of the mystic's given religion. The success of the mystic depends in great measure on his or her ability to integrate the experience in the normative structures of religious belief and behavior. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines. Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1994, 55–58.

¹³⁵ Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92), 3.

but, as Scholem is quick to note, what distinguishes Jewish messianism from its Christian counterpart is the fact that the former considers redemption as an external, historical event and not merely an inward transformation of spirit.¹³⁶ The eschaton, Jewishly understood, is the ultimate stage of history, not a stage beyond history. The eternal must be fully realized in time as temporal and not merely as eternal. It is precisely such a dimension that is obscured in Rosenzweig's theology. The eschatological does, for Rosenzweig, as I have repeatedly emphasized, have a historical dimension. Christianity, the eternal way, is continuously striving to reach the end; Judaism, the eternal life, proleptically dwells in the end and thereby imparts meaning and direction to historical movement. Nevertheless, in an absolute sense, the eschaton is not a concrete moment in history, but rather eternity beyond history. As Altmann already pointed out, according to Rosenzweig, the future "is a dimension of existence rather than a fixed point" and thus "ceases to be an historical category".¹³⁷ Hence, while the eschaton gives meaning to history, by its nature it escapes history. In the devouring light of the star of redemption, both the eternal way (Christianity) and the eternal life (Judaism) vanish. The eschatological status of the Synagogue depends upon that of the Church for eternal life itself can only be when eternity is on its way, i. e., when there is history. But God, the eternal truth, the All-in-All, lies beyond both eternal configurations: "God is truth. Truth is his signet."¹³⁸ By it he is known. And will be even when one day all has come to an end by which he used to make his eternity known within Time — all eternal life, all eternal way — there where even the eternal comes to an end: in eternity. For not the way alone ends here, but life too. Eternal life, after all, endures only so long as life in general. There is eternal life only in contrast to the life of those who pave the eternal way, which is always exclusively temporal. The desire for eternity sighs forth out of the well-pits of this temporality; if it assumes the form of a longing for eternal life, that is only because it itself is temporal life. Of a truth, in truth, life disappears."¹³⁹

Rosenzweig's eschatology culminates in a "lifeless" life, i. e., in a life beyond life. God, the eternal light, overcomes life just as love overcomes death, or, alternatively expressed, redemption fulfills revelation just as revelation fulfills creation. Hence, the eschaton is described as God's "great Sabbath". "For God himself, redemption is the eternal deed in which he frees himself from having anything confront him that is not he himself. Redemption frees God from the work of creation as well as from his loving concern for the soul. Redemption is his day of rest, his great

¹³⁶ Scholem, *Messianic Idea* (n. 92), 2.

¹³⁷ Altmann, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 29), 209.

¹³⁸ Based on the rabbinic dictum in Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 55a.

¹³⁹ SR, 380.

Sabbath, the day which is but adumbrated in the Sabbath of creation. It is the day when, freed from all that is outside himself, from all that is ever and again compared to him, incomparable though he is, he 'will be one and his name: One'.¹⁴⁰ Redemption redeems God by releasing him from his revealed name. ... The process of redemption in the world takes place in the name and for the sake of the name. The end, however, is nameless; it is above any name. The very sanctification of the name occurs only so that the name might one day be muted. Beyond the word – and what is name but the collective word – beyond the word there shines silence."¹⁴¹ In the end, therefore, as in the beginning, God is nameless: just as the protocosmos (Vorwelt) of creation lies before the divine word so too the hypercosmos (Überwelt) of redemption. God created the world by means of the name and in the moment of revelation that name was disclosed; in redemption, however, the name gives way to silence.¹⁴² The dialogue of revelation conquers the monologue of creation, but in the unification of the redemption the dialogical itself, which is expressed most perfectly in the liturgical community, gives way to speechlessness. "In eternity the spoken word fades into the silence of perfect togetherness – for union occurs in silence only; the word unites, but those who are united fall silent. And so liturgy, the reflector which focuses the sunbeams of eternity in the small circle of the year, must introduce man to this silence".¹⁴³ For Rosenzweig, redemption is not only the redemption of humanity and cosmos but, and perhaps most significantly, also that of God, an idea that resonates deeply with one of the most important themes in the kabbalistic tradition, especially prevalent in the sixteenth-century theosophy developed by Isaac Luria and his disciples.¹⁴⁴ "Time and the hour – only before God they are powerless, since for him redemption is truly as old as creation and revelation. For him, moreover, redemption is self-redemption: he is not only Redeemer but also redeemed".¹⁴⁵ Through redemption God is redeemed from being creator and revealer. The final redemption is the overcoming of all temporal and historical existence; it is the realization of timelessness, the lifeless light. In the final hour, which strictly speaking is no hour at all, everything will be as it originally was

¹⁴⁰ Zech 14:9.

¹⁴¹ SR, 383.

¹⁴² On the significance of the name of God in Rosenzweig's thought, see Barbara Galli, Rosenzweig and the Name of God, in: *Modern Judaism* 14, 1994, 63–86. See also Rosenzweig, *Understanding* (n. 3), 79–80, and the remarks of Rosenzweig in his notes to Halevi's poem, translated as *Der Name*, in Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 22), 206–207.

¹⁴³ SR, 308–309.

¹⁴⁴ Compare the description of the wanderings of the Shekhinah and the scattering of the sparks of divine light as well as the account of the unification of God in SR, 409–411, and discussion of the probable kabbalistic background for these motifs in Idel, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 125), 165–166. See also Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 280–281.

¹⁴⁵ SR, 272.

before creation: God will be All-in-All, speechless, nameless, ineffable, complete, the pure light that overcomes life. It is thus that Rosenzweig describes the eternity of truth: "Life has gone up in light. The mute darkness of the protocosmos had found speech in death. And something stronger, love, had overpowered death. Love had chosen life. And as the protocosmos had found its voice in death, so now life rallies in the silence of hypercosmos and is transformed into light. God is not life: God is light."¹⁴⁶

Rosenzweig's theology arrives at a mystical-metaphysical understanding of redemption that resembles the Neoplatonic doctrine of apokatastasis: the return of all things to their source in the One.¹⁴⁷ To be redeemed is to overcome time, life, and history. What is lacking is the concrete dimension of Jewish messianism, which, according to Scholem's terminology, is related to the restorative and utopian aspects. Thus we meet a profound irony in Rosenzweig's thought: The goal toward which history is striving must forever remain outside of history insofar as it is the goal of history. The eschaton, which Israel anticipates in the present, is not the climax of history but eternity beyond history. Eternal truth belongs only to God who is the Alpha and Omega: "Of a truth, in truth, life too disappears. ... It is transformed, and having been transformed, is no more".¹⁴⁸ Redemption in its absolute sense falls outside of history: the star of eternity casts its light in time only from a distance.

We see how far this is from the utopian promise lodged in the heart of prophetic messianism. Rosenzweig attempted to save history from the crisis of historicism, but in the process he obfuscated an essential feature of Jewish eschatology, which truly renders history meaningful. It is for this reason that Rosenzweig's theology remains fundamentally tragic. But it is tragic in another sense that relates more specifically to Rosenzweig's own understanding of modern tragedy as the "view of the world and one's position in it from one specific point of view, to wit, that of the individual, personal I".¹⁴⁹ The modern tragedy, therefore, implicates the "absolute man in his relationship to the absolute object ... this absolute human being who not only confronts the Absolute knowingly, but who has experienced the Absolute and who now, out of this experience, lives within the Absolute".¹⁵⁰ There is no question, as I indicated at the outset of this paper, that the driving force behind the *Star* is the attempt to ground theological reflection in a realm of human experience wherein the

¹⁴⁶ SR, 380.

¹⁴⁷ See Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy* (n. 13), 204–205; Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 266–267.

¹⁴⁸ SR, 380.

¹⁴⁹ SR, 210.

¹⁵⁰ SR, 210–211.

unity of the three basic elements in the grand systems of philosophical Idealism (God, human, and world) has been shattered. In language that intentionally reflects the technical terminology of Lurianic kabbalah, Scholem thus described Rosenzweig's work: "This 'breaking of the vessels' of idealism is what Rosenzweig came to repair in his book. Theology builds for him this restored world".¹⁵¹ The Lurianic background to Scholem's remarks is even more transparent in the original Hebrew, a version of which was first delivered as an address at Hebrew University commemorating the month anniversary of Rosenzweig's death: The expressions "breaking of the vessels" and "restored world" are rendered respectively as *shevirat ha-kelim* and *'olam ha-tiqun*, two technical terms in the Lurianic kabbalah.¹⁵²

There is much truth in Scholem's comment, for the position articulated by Rosenzweig in the third book of the *Star* is clearly something of a retrieval of an idealistic posture that shares a basic approach with kabbalistic ontology.¹⁵³ I would argue that this affinity is even more profound in light of the fact that, contrary to the standard opinion (affirmed by Scholem as well¹⁵⁴), the eschatology proffered by Luria ostensibly retains the standard locution of prophetic messianism with its geopolitical focus but in fact advances a doctrine of redemption based on the Neoplatonic conception of the reintegration of the many into the One. It lies beyond the scope of this study to explore this complex matter in an appropriate manner. Let me simply provide one textual reference that illustrates the point: Hayyim Vital, Luria's major disciple, characterizes the messianic age in terms of a rabbinic formulation used to refer to the

¹⁵¹ Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 125), 26.

¹⁵² Gershom Scholem, *Devarim be-Go*, Tel-Aviv (Am Oved) 1975, 412–413. An abbreviated version was published as the "Diwre Askara" in Franz Rosenzweig, *Ein Buch des Gedenkens*, Berlin (Soncino-Gesellschaft) 1930, 51–56; the relevant passage occurs on 53. Regarding the Lurianic terminology, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York (Schocken Books) 1954, 265–278.

¹⁵³ On the Hegelian dimension of Rosenzweig's anti-Hegelian system, with a particular focus on his views regarding the redemption, see Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy. A Preface to Future Jewish Thought*, New York (Schocken Books) 1980, 133. See also the study of Labarrière cited above, n. 55.

¹⁵⁴ To be sure, Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 152), 268, acknowledges that the eschatological goal in the Lurianic kabbalah entails the "restoration of the ideal order, which forms the original aim of creation, is also the secret purpose of all existence. Salvation means actually nothing but restitution, re-integration of the original whole, or *Tikkun*, to use the Hebrew term". In a second passage, 274, Scholem observes that the "true nature of the redemption is mystical", but he insists that the "historical and national aspects are merely ancillary symptoms which constitute a visible symbol of its consummation". Rather than deny the literal belief in the coming of the Messiah, Scholem is of the opinion that the Lurianic kabbalists viewed this actual historical event as the external sign that the redemption of being in general (cosmic, human, and divine) is complete. Beyond the rhetoric of traditional messianism, I see no reason to preserve the literal interpretation.

eschaton, the return of the world to a state of chaos (tohu va-vohu, according to Gen 1:2). What is so striking about Vital's position is that this state of chaos actually characterizes the condition of the infinite when all things are restored to and reintegrated in it.¹⁵⁵ This state is further characterized by the reconstitution of the male androgyne such that the female other is contained in the male, an idea expressed most often by the images of the wife as the crown of her husband or that of the eschatological crown placed on the head of the righteous.¹⁵⁶ For the purposes of this study what is most important to note is that this state represents the cessation of heterosexual eros and the end of history. Although Rosenzweig does not indulge in the complex intricacies of the gender symbolism of kabbalistic theosophy, he does depict redemption as a mystical unification of all particular existents in the One, which summons the termination of historical time in a manner comparable to the Lurianic idea of *tiqqun*, restoration or reintegration of the original whole. Hence, in the final analysis, the man who experiences redemption shares with the modern tragic hero the goal of not only confronting but living within the Absolute.

Rosenzweig acknowledges the turn of his eschatology towards the ideal of unity, but he nevertheless attempts to distinguish his own sense of unity as process from the substance orientation of the philosophical Idealism: "Philosophy claimed unity on behalf of the All as a self-evident presupposition. For us, however, it is the ultimate result, indeed the result of the result. It is a point as far beyond the 'route' as its divine origin lay beyond its beginning. Unity is, then, in truth but Becoming-unity; it is – only as it becomes. And it becomes – only as unity of God. Only God is – nay, precisely: only God becomes the unity which consummates everything."¹⁵⁷ Rosenzweig convincingly demarcates the unity of existence implied by his own thinking from that of idealistic philosophy. Without making the point explicitly, it is obvious that Rosenzweig attempts to transcend the standard dichotomy between being (unity) and becoming (multiplicity). That is, the oneness that he posits is a "becoming of unity" (*Werden zur Einheit*), which is to say that it is one only to the degree that

¹⁵⁵ Hayyim Vital, *Mavo' She'arim*, Jerusalem, 1904, 2.3.2, 12a; Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Haqdamot*, Jerusalem, 1909, 28c.

¹⁵⁶ See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square. Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, Albany (State University of New York Press) 1995, 116–118.

¹⁵⁷ SR, 258. Rosenzweig labels such an orientation as the "commonsense" position in Rosenzweig, *Understanding* (n. 3), 77: "All that remains, then, is ... the attempt to take this phantasm seriously. Let us seek for the essence in the heart of the appearance not somewhere behind it, let us look for it not in a single phenomenon but in the abundant whole. God is thus not something wholly other, essentially mind or world, but everything. He is everything which at any time bore the name of God. ... God is the sum of all of His manifestations, transient though they be. That is all".

it becomes unified, but it becomes unified only insofar as it is the unity of God. Notwithstanding this critical difference, one is left to ponder if in this "unity which consummates everything" (die alles voll-endet) one can still speak of ontological difference in any meaningful way.

Mosès has argued that what distinguishes Rosenzweig's eschatological notion of the unity of all things from Hegelian idealism is that, according to the former, human existence is understood fundamentally not in terms of a "universal Self that would think the Absolute," but as a "singular person opening up to exteriority".¹⁵⁸ Rosenzweig avoids the circle of consciousness closing in on itself inasmuch as his notion of religious experience is such that it constantly points to God who is beyond being.¹⁵⁹ Elsewhere Mosès has argued that in the *Star* Rosenzweig wavers between realism and mysticism, the concrete experience of the immediate reality of God, humanity, and world, on the one hand, and the original experience of the meeting between the human being and God, on the other, which results in the unification of the different elements. "At the end, however, he appears to be carried away by realism, since the mystic experience of revelation, even though it is the central moment of the system, is presented as a dialectic moment that must be passed through, as a point of departure destined to lead to life".¹⁶⁰ Still, we must ask, in light of the all-consuming blaze of the star can the correlative and dialogical relationship with the other ultimately be preserved? Is there really an other of which to speak in the face of the One that is "even above the Whole?"¹⁶¹ In what sense can we continue to speak of an absolute transcendence? To be sure, the otherness of the human vis-à-vis the divine is maintained precisely because as creature one does not glimpse the whole truth. To see the truth in its totality would be tantamount to death, which involves traversing the boundaries of mortality. "We cling to our creatureliness. ... And our creatureliness is determined by the fact that we only take part, only are part. Life had celebrated the ultimate triumph over death in the Truly with which it verifies the personally vouchsafed truth imparted to it as its portion in eternal truth. With this Truly, the creature fastens itself to its portion which was imported to it. In this Truly, it is creature. ... And in the Star it flares up into visible, self-illuminating existence. But it remains ever within the boundaries of creatureliness. Truth itself still says Truly when it steps before God."¹⁶²

In spite of his attempt to preserve the ontological autonomy of the three elements, the inevitable result of Rosenzweig's system is that the

¹⁵⁸ Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 267.

¹⁵⁹ Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 293.

¹⁶⁰ Mosès, *Franz Rosenzweig* (n. 132), 192.

¹⁶¹ SR, 417.

¹⁶² SR, 416.

final moment of redemption is characterized by the dissolution of the distinct forms of being and the absorption of man and world in the God-head. In the end, therefore, Rosenzweig succumbs to the idealistic tendency (enhanced further by his affinity to kabbalistic theosophy) to reduce the divine, at least as the latter is available to human experience, to an imaginative construct of the human mind.

Configuration of the Divine Face in the Mirror of the Self

The extent to which the ontic otherness of God vis-à-vis human consciousness is challenged by the depth of Rosenzweig's own spiritual insight can be seen most clearly in the unique role that he assigns to the anthropomorphic representation of God, a motif that appears in a variety of critical junctures in the *Star*, not to mention in his other writings.¹⁶³ The first example that I will discuss occurs in the context of Rosenzweig's assertion that through revelatory speech the silence of death loses its claim on the individuality of the self. Death, Rosenzweig reminds the reader, is the "capstone of creation", for it "stamps every created thing with the ineradicable stamp of creatureliness, the word 'has been'".¹⁶⁴ By contrast, love lives only in the present and as such challenges death. Thus love transforms the "keystone of the somber arch of creation" into the "cornerstone of the bright house of revelation. For the soul, revelation means the experience of a present which, while it rests on the presence of a past, nevertheless does not make its home in it but walks in the light of the divine countenance".¹⁶⁵ It is not the ordinary speech of everydayness that accomplishes the task of overcoming the finitude of death. It is, rather, the language of the human-divine dialogue that emerges from (or is ground in) the revelatory encounter. The speech of revelation, however, overcomes another death, which is a necessary consequence of creation: "That which had struggled to the surface out of God's 'Nought' as self-negation of this Nought, re-emerged from its immersion into God's living 'Aught', not any longer as the self-negation, but rather as world-affirmation. God's vitality thus became to a certain extent again a Nought, a Nought on a higher level, Nought only with reference to that which emerged from it, but in its own right a Nought full of character, in short no Nought but an Aught. It was Nought only in this respect that, in

¹⁶³ See Barbara Galli, Rosenzweig Speaking of Meetings and Monotheism in Biblical Anthropomorphisms, in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, 1992, 219–243. On the use of anthropomorphism, see also the exchange of letters between Michael Oppenheim and Norma Joseph in Michael Oppenheim, *Mutual Upholding. Fashioning Jewish Philosophy Through Letters*, New York (Peter Lang) 1992, 83–116.

¹⁶⁴ SR, 156.

¹⁶⁵ SR, 157.

disclosing itself, it at once broke up into new configurations. ... For these new configurations have nothing designable behind them out of which they might have emerged.”¹⁶⁶

The manifestation of the revealed God from the depths of the concealed God involves the self-negation of the divine Nought (Nichts), a double negative that yields the positive Aught (Etwas) of creation. In this disclosure, the vitality of God becomes a Nought, which Rosenzweig explains in terms of the fact that, in the act of disclosing itself, the formless nothingness of the protocosmic God breaks up into new configurations. Inasmuch as death is essentially related to the imposition of limit, the process by means of which the boundless energy of the concealed Nought assumes the specific form of the configurations may be compared to a kind of death on the part of the divine. The transition from limitlessness to limit is itself an ontological demarcation that may be compared figuratively to death even though Rosenzweig does not use this precise terminology. Paradoxically, creation, which is not merely the creation of the world but also the becoming-manifest of the hidden God, is at the same time a negation.

In the articulation of this notion, based as it is on the retrieval of the mythopoeisis of paganism in the heart of a Jewish cosmology, Rosenzweig (perhaps through the influence of Schelling¹⁶⁷) comes remarkably close to the foundational insight in kabbalistic theosophy,¹⁶⁸ expressed most vividly by the disciples of the sixteenth-century master, Isaac Luria. The creative process necessitates the negation of the Infinite, a paradoxical insight that is referred to as *sod ha-tsimtsum*, the “mystery of contraction”, in the Lurianic sources.¹⁶⁹ The philosophical question to which the kabbalists were responding is clear enough: In order for there to be existence that is other than God, there had to be the withdrawal of the divine from itself and into itself. On a deeper and more esoteric level, however, this act of withdrawal represents the beginning of the catharsis of the unbalanced force of judgment from the divine economy.¹⁷⁰ What is

¹⁶⁶ SR, 157.

¹⁶⁷ See Gibbs, *Correlations* (n. 2), 42–44. On the influence of Schelling on Rosenzweig, see Cordula Hufnagel, *Die kultische Gebärde. Kunst, Politik, Religion im Denken Franz Rosenzweigs*, Freiburg/München (Verlag Karl Alber) 1994.

¹⁶⁸ The essential link between kabbalah and anthropomorphism is made explicitly by Rosenzweig in his ‘Anmerkung über Anthropomorphismus’, partially translated, in: *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*. Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Will Herberg, and Abraham J. Heschel, edited by Fritz A. Rothschild, New York (Crossroad) 1990, 227–228. See Rivka Horwitz, *Franz Rosenzweig, Unpublished Writings*, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 20, 1969, 73–75; and Idel, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbalah* (n. 125), 169–171.

¹⁶⁹ See Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 152), 260–265.

¹⁷⁰ Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 152), 263, and the fuller discussion in Isaiah Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil and the ‘Kelippah’ in Lurianic Kabbalism*, Jerusalem (Magnes Press) 1984 (in Hebrew).

most important to point out in this context is that the Lurianic kabbalists understood the initial act of withdrawal to create a space within the Infinite devoid of the divine overflow as a manifestation of the attribute of judgment, which is associated with the quality of limitation. The eventual emergence of the *partzufim*, the term used in Lurianic texts to designate the various configurations of the divine light,¹⁷¹ is a later phase in this process of delimitation of the infinite energy. The kabbalists, like Rosenzweig, perceive that creation is dependent on delimitation, which implies, therefore, that expansion and contraction, egression (*hitpashtut*) and regression (*hitalqut*), are not mutually exclusive antinomies. Disclosure is itself a form of concealment just as concealment is a form of disclosure. Translated grammatologically, this dialectic signifies that every affirmation is a negation and every negation an affirmation. The finitude of temporality, which is correlated with the theological category of creation, signifies a sense of dying on the part of God as well as on the part of humanity.

The way beyond this double negation of self is the positive assertion of love in the moment of revelation, which effects the transition from the monologue of creation to the dialogue of revelation. "Precisely for the sake of its revelational character, the first revelation in creation thus demands the emergence of a 'second' revelation, a revelation which is nothing more than revelation, a revelation in the narrower — nay in the narrowest — sense".¹⁷² The revelation in the narrowest sense refers to the effluence of the divine presence that takes place in the moment. This quality of revelation, the perpetuity of the present, which represents the fullness of time, liberates creation from its sense of createdness and thus provides the possibility for the overcoming of death. The creator, too, is liberated from the possibility of regressing back into the structureless nothing of the protocosmos. In the mode of revealer, therefore, God is fixed in the instant of the authentic present that is at the same time the disclosure of the past and of the future.

In the moment of the revelatory experience, God assumes the role of the (male) lover whose love is expressed as the continually renewed self-sacrifice on behalf of the (female) beloved. This sacrifice of self, however, is not akin to the self-negation of creation; on the contrary, the sacrifice of self is, in truth, the affirmation of the self in dialogical relation to the beloved who receives the gift. By accepting the gift, the beloved

¹⁷¹ Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 152), 269–273. Amos Funkenstein, *Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Religious Polemics in the Middle Ages*, in: *The Jews in European History. Seven Lectures*, edited by Wolfgang Beck, Cincinnati (Hebrew Union College Press) 1994, 33, renders the kabbalistic use of the term *partzufim* as "divine constellations" on the grounds that it derives etymologically from the Greek *prósopon*, which he renders as "persona" rather than "face".

¹⁷² SR, 161.

maintains her own autonomy, but at the same time it is as if she gives a gift in return to the lover. Revelation is the bestowal of the gift on the part of God (the lover) to the soul (the beloved). God's love, therefore, is "always and wholly of today," the presentness of authentic temporality that is the "eternal victory over death".¹⁷³ The love of God is required by the trusting faith that the beloved has for the lover. "The trusting faith of the beloved affirms the momentary love of the lover and consolidates it too into something enduring. ... By its trust, the faith of the soul attests the love of God and endows it with enduring being".¹⁷⁴ Significantly, Rosenzweig refers explicitly to the following dictum of the "master of Kabbala" to illustrate his point: "If you testify to me, then I am God, and not otherwise". The statement to which Rosenzweig refers is, in fact, an interpretation of Isa 43:12 attributed to Simeon ben Yohai in a number of classical midrashic sources.¹⁷⁵ Rosenzweig, of course, identifies the author of this dictum as a "master of Kabbala" on account of the traditional attribution of the *Zohar*, the major work of medieval kabbalah, to Simeon ben Yohai. There is, however, another explanation. The midrashic passage expresses in nascent form one of the major principles in the kabbalistic tradition: God becomes who he is through the actions of human beings. The particular point that Rosenzweig makes here is that just as the lover who sacrifices himself in love is recreated anew by the trust of the beloved, so God's existence is dependent on the affirmation of the soul.

The reciprocal recognition of lover and beloved is expressed in the grammar of eros, which is reflected in the narrative drama of Song of Songs. In his treatment of this biblical lyric, Rosenzweig comes astounding close to the inner chambers of kabbalistic speculation. The language of love is predicated on the metaphorical representation of the divine in human terms. But Rosenzweig, like the kabbalists, does not want to reduce this symbolic use of language to mere allegory. It is not simply speaking about God that matters here, but the encountering of the divine through the speech of revelation. In an extraordinary passage, Rosenzweig compares the parable (*Gleichnis*) to the nature of love, for both partake of the "sensual-supersensual" (*sinnlich-übersinnlich*). "And by speaking, love already becomes superhuman, for the sensuality of the word is brimful with its divine supersense".¹⁷⁶ The dialogue of love in the Song of Songs is interpreted parabolically as referring to the relationship of the masculine God and the feminine soul. The eroticism of the text is reflected in the very structure of the parable. Here the dichotomy

¹⁷³ SR, 164.

¹⁷⁴ SR, 171.

¹⁷⁵ See Idel, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 125), 163 and sources given on 242 n. 4.

¹⁷⁶ SR, 201.

between appearance and reality breaks down: "But love is not 'but a metaphor'; it is metaphor in its entirety and its essence; it is only apparently transitory: in truth, it is eternal. The appearance is as essential as the truth here, for love could not be eternal as love if it did not appear to be transitory. But in the mirror of the appearance, truth is directly mirrored" (aber im Spiegel dieses Scheins spiegelt sich unmittelbar die Wahrheit).¹⁷⁷ The transitoriness of love, which is conveyed by the nature of the parable, no doubt relates to the anthropomorphic representation of the divine lover in relation to the human beloved. In the speculum of the text, one sees the appearance of God. To be sure, this is merely appearance, for God is not a body subject to erotic passions, but in the mirror truth is how it appears. In the dialogical moment when the human being confronts the divine, the image is real.

The importance of this insight becomes clear in the end of the *Star* when Rosenzweig speaks of the eternal truth becoming the figure (Gestalt) of the countenance of God in the star of redemption. The truth, Rosenzweig insists, is completely identified with this countenance. "And the truth is none other than the countenance of this figure. Truth alone is its countenance".¹⁷⁸ Aware of the obvious clash between his emphasis on the visual dimension of the encounter with the divine presence and the biblical preference for the auditory,¹⁷⁹ Rosenzweig argues that the latter relates to the "revealed world", whereas he is referring to an experience in the "redeemed world above-and-beyond".¹⁸⁰ The truth that one sees in the "redeemed hypercosmos" has already been heard in the "world of revelation".¹⁸¹ Rosenzweig applies the decidedly ocularcentric culmination of the priestly blessing, "May he make his countenance shine upon you" (Num. 6:25), to the world of redemption, in which the language of prayer gives way to silence. Here no words are appropriate; cognition (Erkenntnis) of God is consummated by the recognition (Wiedererkenntnis) that ensues from the silent contemplative gaze upon the splendor of the divine face.

¹⁷⁷ SR (I have slightly altered Hallo's translation). A similar argument is made by Rosenzweig, in: Rosenzweig, *Understanding* (n. 3), 56–57: Everything in the world bears the name of God, but God is wholly other in relation to the world. Hence, the world at best can be reflection or appearance. But the miracle and mystery of revelation is such that in that moment the appearance of God in the world is real.

¹⁷⁸ SR, 418.

¹⁷⁹ In fact, Rosenzweig only alludes to Deut 4:12, "The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of the words but perceived no shape – nothing but a voice", a verse that clearly supports his general understanding of biblical aniconism. In truth, however, the biblical sources are more equivocal, with some affirming the visual pole of revelation and others the auditory. See Wolfson, *Speculum* (n. 134), 13–28.

¹⁸⁰ SR, 418.

¹⁸¹ SR, 424.

This configuration of the divine visage (göttlichen Angesicht) is not to be understood merely as figurative truth: "But for him whom he lets his visage shine upon, to him he also turns his visage. As he turns his visage to us, so may we recognize him. And this cognition does not recognize figuratively. Rather it recognizes the truth as it is, that is as it is in God: as his countenance and part. ... In the Star of Redemption, then, in which we saw divine truth become figure, there shines forth none other than the countenance which God turned shiningly toward us."¹⁸² When the countenance of God shines upon the soul, the figuration of the divine is more than just figurative. Anthropomorphic representations of God are not merely ways of speaking about an unknowable deity; they present the symbolic forms by means of which the human imagination visually apprehends and confronts the divine face: "We speak in images. But the images are not arbitrary. ... The irreversibility of the truth can only be enunciated in the image of a living being. ... And of living beings in turn there, where self-consciousness is awake to this designation: in man. And just as the truth, which gave itself configuration in the Star, is in turn assigned within the Star to God as whole truth, and not to man or the world, so too the Star must once more mirror itself in that which, within the corporeality, is again the Upper: the countenance. Thus it is not human illusion if Scripture speaks of God's countenance and even of his separate bodily parts. There is no other way to express the Truth. Only when we see the Star as countenance do we transcend every possibility and simply see."¹⁸³

The reappropriation of anthropomorphic and mythical language on Rosenzweig's part to characterize the nature of God in the peak religious experience of beholding the divine face is strikingly reminiscent of the kabbalistic tradition.¹⁸⁴ It is well known that one of the essential features of the theosophic kabbalah is its portrayal of God in bold anthropomorphic terms, which frequently embrace the issues of gender and sexuality. No kabbalist would have argued with the standard medieval philosophical position that the God of Judaism is incorporeal. On the other hand, kabbalists well understood that the vibrancy of religious experience in a theistic tradition like Judaism is predicated on the possibility of imaging the divine anthropomorphically. The anthropomorphic images are not presented by the kabbalists as either literal or figurative truths. Rather, these images are symbols constructed in the imagination through which the suprasensible reality is experienced (not merely described) in sensual

¹⁸² SR, 418.

¹⁸³ SR, 422.

¹⁸⁴ See Mosès, *Revelation* (n. 10), 283–285; Cohen, *Elevations* (n. 2), 246–267; and the seventh chapter, *Redemption*. See *Seeing the Face of the Other*, in: Kornberg-Greenberg, *Better Than Wine* (n. 34).

and embodied terms.¹⁸⁵ As in the case of Rosenzweig, for the kabbalists, in the moment of ecstatic experience, the conflict between image and reality dissolves.

In the visual encounter, anthropomorphism and theomorphism converge: God is imaged in human terms because the human is imaged in divine terms. In seeing God, one sees oneself, for in seeing oneself, one sees God. "In the innermost sanctum of the divine truth, where man might expect all the world and himself to dwindle into likeness of that which he is to catch sight of there, he thus catches sight of none other than a countenance like his own. The Star of Redemption is become countenance which glances at me and out of which I glance. Not God becomes my mirror, but God's truth. God, who is the last and the first — he unlocked to me doors of the sanctuary which is built in the innermost middle. He allowed himself to be seen. He led me to the border of life where seeing is vouchsafed. For 'no man shall see him and live'.¹⁸⁶ Thus the sanctuary where he granted me to see him had to be a segment of the hypercosmos in the world itself, a life beyond life."¹⁸⁷ Just as the kabbalists generally distinguish the Infinite in its concealed being (designated as Ein-Sof) and the anthropomorphic manifestation of the divine in the sefirotic pleroma, Rosenzweig distinguishes God and his truth. But in the experiential moment this conceptual distinction evaporates insofar as God is disclosed in the configuration of the truth as for the kabbalists the Infinite is revealed through the imaginal form of the divine anthropos. Note that Rosenzweig says that God allows himself to be seen at the border of human life. In this visual gaze, God is his truth, and his truth is the countenance that reflects the face of the human being. By beholding the countenance of God in the star of redemption, the person sees his own image. In that moment of self reflection, the ontic gap separating human and divine is closed. Seeing the face of God leads to death for the self is mystically identified with God.

In one of his diary entries of 1922, Rosenzweig related this quietistic element to revelation to the degree that it anticipates redemption: "It overcomes the creaturely death and establishes the rights of the redeeming death. He who loves *no longer* believes in death and *only* believes in death".¹⁸⁸ The dialogical love of revelation overcomes the physical death imposed by creation, but that love itself is overcome by the spiritual death experienced in redemption, which results in the reintegration of the self in the oneness of God. In the final words of the *Star*, Rosenzweig describes the gate that "leads out of the mysterious-miraculous light of the

¹⁸⁵ See Wolfson, *Speculum* (n. 134), 61–67.

¹⁸⁶ Based on Exod 33:20.

¹⁸⁷ SR, 423–424.

¹⁸⁸ Cited in Mosès, Franz Rosenzweig (n. 132) 191.

divine sanctuary in which no man can remain alive".¹⁸⁹ The way to exit from the mystical death of the self and to enter back into life is through acts of piety summarized by the prophetic injunction to walk humbly with God.¹⁹⁰ There can be no doubt that Rosenzweig felt the tug pulling him back into the life of community and dialogue. It is nevertheless clear that he embraced a mystical understanding of the religious life that demands the renunciation of this world and the restoration to the Godhead. As in the case of the Lurianic kabbalah, for Rosenzweig the mystical and messianic are welded together, for the eschatological end is a return to the cosmological beginning. The emergence of all things from God ends with the return of all things to God.¹⁹¹

Zusammenfassung

Franz Rosenzweigs (1886–1929) »neues Denken« ist eine Form des »radikalen Empirismus«, der die für den Deutschen Idealismus des 19. Jahrhunderts fundamentale Annahme einer Einheit von Gott, Mensch und Welt in Frage stellt. Genuine religiöse Einsicht gründet auf der Anerkennung der Irreduzibilität dieser drei Elemente. Der Ausgangspunkt der Philosophie muß der Tod des Individuums sein, der zugleich die Geburt des Selbst ist. Der *Stern der Erlösung* ist in einem präzisen Sinn eine Reise vom Tod zum Leben, die mit den Worten »Vom Tode« beginnt und mit den Worten »Ins Leben« endet. Der Mittelpunkt auf dem Weg vom Tod zum Leben ist die Offenbarung, der Sieg über den Tod. Rosenzweigs Verdienst ist es, einen Stil philosophischer Reflexion zu präsentieren, der die reduktionistischen Tendenzen des idealistischen Denkens verneint. Gleichwohl beschreibt auch Rosenzweig das eschatologische Moment, und zwar in Gestalt einer Rückkehr aller Dinge in die göttliche Einheit. Verstärkt durch seine Affinität zur kabbalistischen Theosophie, erliegt er so der idealistischen Tendenz, das Göttliche zu einem Konstrukt der menschlichen Einbildungskraft zu reduzieren. Rosenzweig entfaltet ein mystisches Verständnis des religiösen Lebens, das die Entsagung von dieser Welt und die Wiederherstellung aller Dinge in die Gottheit fordert. Wie im Falle der »Lurianischen« Kabbalah sind für Rosenzweig das Mystische und das Messianische miteinander verschmolzen, da das eschatologische Ende eine Rückkehr zum kosmologischen Anfang bedeutet.

¹⁸⁹ SR, 424.

¹⁹⁰ Micah 6:8.

¹⁹¹ My language reflects the description of the doctrine of redemption in the Lurianic kabbalah given by Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 152), 274.