

Politics, Theology, Race, and Religion:

The 1916-1924 Dialogue of Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

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In a 1924 paper revised from a 1916 letter sent initially to his friend the Jewish educator and theorist Franz Rosenzweig, the historian of jurisprudence and Christian revolution, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, wrote the following of November 9, 1918. “That day caused everyone, from Hindenburg to Liebknecht, to die, to break through to a new time, to change. So we indeed have a life in common despite it all.” He understood that the communicative force of revolution in time from before to after, the transformation from old to new, also brings the participants together into communal space, a commons and a cosmos. Hindenburg and Liebknecht are opposites bound together in the coincidence of government, polity, time and territory. Rosenstock-Huessy made this remark after 1923’s gradual stabilization calmed years of turmoil. Arguing that the practical study of the soul needs more than humanistic and scientific inquiry into mind and body, the paper speculates on immortality, life which proceeds *from* death in the course of translation, “a venture and an advance into unseen territory.” Translation renders practice transcendent; but to “cross over to another shore: that is the risk of politics.”¹ Politics according to Rosenstock-Huessy not only risks life for death, but wagers its life after death. Even before 1924 politics and theology were linked controversially, as the Rosenzweig-Rosenstock debate demonstrates.

¹ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Practical Knowledge of the Soul* [PKS] (Argo Books: 1988), 51, 66.

I unpack Rosenstock-Huessy's 1924 argument for the immortality of revolution in the context of a vital discussion about Judaism and Christianity, ethnicity and faith, and sustaining sacrifice. Even before their seminal 1916-1917 discussion, the Jewish thought of Rosenzweig's from 1913 had put up the stumbling block for Rosenstock. The Jewish and Christian disputes of 1916-1924 writings and correspondence raised major questions about life or *bios*, practice (politics), and its transcendence (theology).

Rosenzweig and Rosenstock were fast, close friends with conflicting temperaments. After leaving his position as lecturer in Leipzig to serve as a German officer during World War I, Rosenstock elected to edit the in-house newspaper of a Daimler-Benz automobile assembly plant in Stuttgart; he was throughout his life committed to unskilled laborers' education. In 1923, he accepted an appointment to professor of law at the University of Breslau, until fleeing Nazi Germany to the U.S. in 1933, where he took up residence first at Harvard University, and then as professor of social philosophy from 1935 until 1957 at Dartmouth. Whereas Rosenstock fitfully pursued his career, Rosenzweig underwent a reconversion. Indeed, the turmoil over Rosenzweig's 1913 vow to "turn Christian" led him to reject the 1920 offer of a professorship by F. Meinecke with the rationale that his "collapse" would not permit the delayed gratification of scholarly research – it called him to face the "demands of the day."² Aiming to disrupt every whole that swallows any part, Rosenzweig questioned the identity philosophy ascribed to the self, orienting the act of the agent instead around the metaphysical reality attained by the Jewish People and the historical realization sought by

² See *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* [FRLT], edited by Nachum Glatzer (Hackett, 1998), 24-25, Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und Sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften* [GS] (Martinus Nijhoff 1979-1984), I: 678.

the Christian individual. Rosenzweig articulates a dual covenant theology that preserves a role for the Jew in Christendom, whereas Rosenstock constructs a dispensationalist theology in which the Christian supersedes Judaism. And Rosenzweig's preservation of Jewish tradition hews to a more politically conservative tack than the liberalism implied by Rosenstock's Christian conversion embracing the progress of change; although, ironically, Rosenzweig's theology seems to more liberal to Rosenstock's conservatism.

Hans-Joachim Schoeps called their exchange (*Judaism Despite Christianity*) "the most important religious dialogue of the twentieth century." More than a discussion of two religions, it is a debate about religion. That Rosenzweig suspects a "religion" which tries to explain the inexplicable and justify the unjustifiable is widely attested. Hegelian theodicy presumes to explain the injustice of a superficial reality from the eternal truth with reference to reality's negative status as virtual nonbeing relative to the previous, traditional and the subsequent, redemptive conditions. Rosenzweig found the result unsatisfactory since it elides the present moment which neither the State nor the Concept could sensibly, sensually express.³ Nor would the neo-Kantian logic of systems the problem at hand because it would putatively swallow the particular contingency into a general necessity. Perhaps the latter would explain why a religion must arise, but the former shows how this and not that religion possibly has force. "Religion itself is always positive religion, beginning with the facts, not with the origin and essence of facts." And the fact of Christianity was irrefutable; he wrote his parents in 1909, "we are Christians in every respect" except baptism.⁴ But he never converted.

³ See Michael Zank, "The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Triangle," in *Modern Judaism* 23:1 (2003): 94-95 n. 27.

⁴ "Our whole civilization is fundamentally Christian" (Rosenzweig, *GS* I: 94-95).

Rosenzweig's Remaining a Jew, 1913-1916

While studying “some law” at Leipzig beginning summer 1912, attending his new friend Eugen Rosenstock’s lectures on medieval constitutional law, Rosenzweig, Rosenstock, and Rudi Ehrenberg enjoyed on July 7, 1913 what they later called their “*Nachtgespräch*.” It was prompted by Selma Lägerlof’s novel *The Miracles of the Antichrist*, with its final words: “Nobody can redeem men from their sufferings, but much shall be forgiven him who re-encourages them to bear these sufferings.” This messianic stance put humanity in its place. Redemption from sin is not an option for human being; but, still, goodness deserves praise. Is goodness then arbitrary and subjective or standard and objective? In their conversation, Rosenzweig “defended the prevailing philosophical relativism of the day, whereas Eugen bore witness to prayer and worship as the prime guides to action.”⁵ Rosenstock then persuaded Rosenzweig of the limit of philosophy.

The *Nachtgespräch* capped Rosenzweig’s mistrust of the capacity to know everything, including failures of metaphysical system, extrapolation from logic to meaning, and theodicy commending good to compensate evil.⁶ In the post-Hegelian German university of the ‘teens, no philosophical school dominated because every school had a place. But confusion about ultimate truth led Rosenzweig to determine that, from its “common ground” of (Biblical) goodness in creation, “any form of philosophical relativism is now impossible to me.”⁷ Neither a dualistic Kantian logic of practical and

⁵ See Rosenstock-Huessy, *Judaism Despite Christianity* (JDC) (Schocken, 1971), 72-73.

⁶ Rosenzweig recalled: “In the Leipzig *Nachtgespräch* Rosenstock pushed me step by step out of the last relativistic position that I still occupied, and forced me to take an absolute standpoint.”

⁷ See *GS I* 133 translated at *JDC* 32-33 and *FRLT* 23-24.

theoretical “reason” nor a dialectical Hegelian system of the “concept” account for the sentence, “God created the earth and the heavens.” No devil in the form of an arbitrary skepticism or a systematic rationality would be able to explain the truth of it. No devil in the form of a random skepticism or a systematic rationality would be able to explain the truth of it. This conclusion opened Rosenzweig to consider another option besides, or, alongside the system of history and the logic of science: *Revelation*. Rosenstock’s proposal was to substitute a revealed faith for the historicism, relativism, and scientism which nineteenth-century philosophy had bequeathed. Their Leipzig discussion took up mutual “questions of faith,” precisely because “it was not Judaism and Christianity that were then arrayed against each other, but rather faith based on revelation [*Offenbarungsglaube*] was contrasted with faithfulness in philosophy [*Philosophiegläubigkeit*].”⁸ The discussion shook Rosenzweig, who sent no letters from July until October 1913.

In July he vowed to accept Christianity with a “reservation.” “I declared that I could turn Christian only *qua* Jew — not through the intermediate stage of paganism.” After entertaining the prospect of conversion, Rosenzweig had second thoughts, later reporting bouts of depression. The hardship was protracted by “his desire not to sever ties with his Christian friends,” especially Rosenstock.⁹ But then in October Rosenzweig

⁸ Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe* (Schocken, 1935), 638-39, translated by Dorothy Emmet (*JDC* 32); see Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Introduction,” *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* [PFR] (Brandeis, 1988), 5.

⁹ *FRLT* 24-25, Rivka Horwitz, “From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s Attitude Toward Kabbalah and Myth” (2005): 48. Rosenzweig admitted to having worried that his friend Rosenstock could not “accept that a Jew is a Jew,” though “he did not suffer from me but from my Judaism.” In a June 15, 1920 letter to Rosenstock’s wife Margrit “Gritli” Rosenstock (*GS* I: 675) Rosenzweig stated: “It is a great act of grace that God has once torn me in my life out of my life.

attended Yom Kippur services at an orthodox synagogue in Berlin, and soon made a declaration to Rudi Ehrenberg: “I have reversed my decision. It [conversion] no longer seems necessary to me, and therefore, being what I am, no longer possible. *I remain therefore a Jew* [Ich bleibe also Jude].” Rosenzweig rescinded the vow to become a Christian through the Judaism he had never left in reality.¹⁰

A mid-October 1913 exchange with his mother evidently provoked Rosenzweig to reformulate Jewish-Christian relations. His mother “approved” the words of a certain Parson J “who preaches humanity” because he ascribes “‘elements’ of truth” to the religious traditions on earth. But, Rosenzweig protests, the Parson relies on the assumption that Christianity alone has “ferreted out [*aufgespiürt*]” the essential elements from their dross, so that Christianity “*alone* possesses the whole truth.” He jokes that Parson J’s admission not only that Judaism is “‘not dead’” but, even more, “‘extremely interests him’” would similarly justify his curiosity about “the Bermuda Islands or somewhere cannibals still live.”¹¹ In this letter, the first after July 1913, Rosenzweig uses Parson J to interrogate Rosenstock’s position, whose position rehearses, according to Rosenzweig, in the mouth of Parson J, a familiar reading of Saint Paul.¹² To Rosenzweig,

From July to September 1913 I was quite willing to die, to let everything within myself die. But this cannot become a rule.”

¹⁰ See *GS* II: 642, Horwitz 2005: 49-50, and Rivka Horwitz 1988, *Buber’s Way to I and Thou* (JPS, 1988), 88; see also *FRLT*, 28, and *GS* I 132-33.

¹¹ *GS* I 127-131, *FRLT* 26-27.

¹² As Amos Funkenstein has noted, Rosenzweig employs a virtue (“Weltverachtung”) for Judaism extolled by Christianity; in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (California, 1993), 292n. 39). Rosenzweig cites John 4:22, which resembles Romans 11-13. On a “celestial Jerusalem” see Galatians 4:25, Revelations 3:12, 21:2. Rosenzweig’s political theology resembles Augustine’s, with a twist: Judaism represents the City of God and Christianity represents the City of Man. See Maurice G. Bowler, “Rosenzweig on Judaism and Christianity - The Two Covenant Theory,” in *Judaism 22:4* (1973): 475-81; David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Oxford UP, 1989), 93-113; Emil Fackenheim, *To*

the *historical development* of Christianity from Judaism misses the point that Judaism *metaphysically* drives this Christian development or, rather, pulls history toward its final cause or end. Rosenzweig replaced what replacement theology replaces, arguing that *just as* genetic Jews are an outstripped point of origin for Christianity *so too* eschatological Judaism shall return in the future as the view of all people who live on this earth, paradigmatically the pagans-cum-Christians. Rosenzweig here twists the dual covenant theology in which Christianity and Judaism play complimentary if not cooperative roles together because Judaism assures redemption by a covenant once made between God and His chosen People Israel, while Christian salvation is secured with a new dispensation granted by God to those who declare their faith in the savior, Jesus Christ.

Rosenzweig underscores the point that from the Christian standpoint “no one can *reach* the Father,” except “through him,” the ‘Lord’ Jesus (see John 14:6). But “it is different if one no longer needs to reach the Father, because he *is* already with him. And this is only the case for the Jewish people.” A “chasm” separates the Jewish people from the Christian individual. Since its historical triumph over its Israelite past exemplifies the fulfillment of Christian salvation, Judaism remains historically dependent on the Christians for their allowance of the Jewish people's survival.¹³ And yet because Jews obtain the connection with God, they do not strive to attain it. The Jews live out remote past and the distant future within the fleeting moment. “The people Israel, chosen by their

Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought (Schocken, 1982), 79-86; and Steven Schwarzschild, *Franz Rosenzweig: Guide to Reversioners* (London, 1960), 31-36.

¹³ “Any 'connection of the innermost heart with God' that the pagan can obtain only 'through him' [Jesus], the Jew possesses [besitzt der Jude] — provided his Judaism is not forcibly denied him — by nature [Natur], through his birth to the chosen people” (GS I 129, and see GS I, 158).

Father, gaze transfixed over world and history to the final distant point at which his Father, the One and Only, will become 'All in All.' At the point that Christ ceases to be the Lord, Israel will cease to be chosen." Whatever the metaphysical promise of Judaism, however, the historical Jews risk suffering under triumphant imperial Christian powers. "This people of God stands in the world, incurring external (persecutions) and internal (torpidity) hardship for its isolation from or rejection of the world." And yet, overturning a Christian view of Jewish stubbornness, Rosenzweig insists that Judaism perpetually awaits the arrival of its anticipated consummation due to no free choice of its own. Because the Jewish people "rejects" any notion "that he (or it) in whom (or which) [the Christians] could fulfill their world-historical mission would have already come," any living Jew attests to the incompleteness of a "mission" which brings every individual together into the "whole truth" of "common humanity," "where *Mensch* and *Christ* will be one."¹⁴ The Jewish People waits because Christianity remains wanting in its achievement of the mission to reach God through Jesus. Christians backslide repeatedly into paganism. For history to catch up with its promised completion, according to Rosenzweig, the Jews "will wait ... as long as there remains a Judaism." He illustrates the claim by allegorizing the aforementioned Cathedrals' pictorial representation of the synagogue, "with broken staff and bound eyes," alongside "the church, with unbreakable staff and eyes open to the world, this champion certain of victory." For its part, the

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 30:11-14 already counters Paul's contention (Romans 7:13-25) that the law is un-fulfill-able; in principle the law could be fulfilled anytime by anyone, since it is only the external expression of our own hearts' desire. This does not mean law is likely to be fulfilled any day in foreseeable future; indeed, the present state of the human condition leaves much to be desired. However, we do not need infinite time or power to increase our efforts to fulfill that law; see Kenneth Seeskin, "Cohen," in *The Routledge History of Jewish Philosophy* (2004), ed. Daniel Franks and Oliver Leaman.

synagogue “must renounce all work in this world and muster all her strength to preserve her life and keep herself untainted by life.” It can accept “the church as the salvation for the heathens” so long as Israel abides “the works of its ritual.” By contrast, while the church is “sent to all men, she must nevertheless not lose herself to what is common to all men.” Just such pagan “foolishness” which corrupts the ultimate goal proffered by the “sign” of Judaism alerts the church of a “stumbling block” for its advancement through the Lord toward the Father. The pagans ask “why then just *this* word” and not any number of others “should be the power of God.” “And when the last pagan has been silenced in time through the work of the church, no one will take the work of the cross — at the *end* of time but still *in* time — to be foolishness.” Pagans who see gods everywhere would hope the church forget about the Jewish “stumbling block” and instead “become reconciled with that which is ‘common to all men’ [*Allgemeinmenschlichen*].”

The synagogue, however, retain its particularity, “not seduced by the *Allgemeinmenschlichen*,” persistently reproves the Church like a “silent warning” not to slide back into paganism. “As long as Judaism remains,” it will stick like a thorn in the side of the church. Until the end, the Jew lives the metaphysical completion of God's promise that Christianity's historical incompleteness precludes. The point that the church retains the charge of preserving the synagogue in the meantime remains a decisive feature of Rosenzweig's thought. Whereas traditional Christianity and Judaism once viewed the individual Jew as mere (physical) part of the whole metaphysical People Israel, modern Jews and Christians have viewed the Jewish people as an historical-political aggregation of individual persons who happen to adhere to the faith of Judaism. Granting legitimacy to the Church's proselytizing the individual, Rosenzweig claims regarding election that

Israel's already being with God “is only the case for the Jewish people (though not for individual Jews).”¹⁵ The individual Jew gains this status only in and through observing a collective Judaism. In the Jewish case, the group defines the individual. Hence any individual Jew is susceptible to the charges made by Christianity or modernity.

Rosenzweig agreed that Christianity had problems not with Judaism “but the acceptance of the People Israel itself.” Its prejudice begins to look more like racism, the denial of an ethnic group’s legitimacy. As Rosenzweig wrote to his mother of Parson J, though Rosenstock is also a target, “The Jew only needs to be a Jew in order to arouse the Christianity for the Christian if he has forgotten it.” In order for the pagan to convert to Christianity, he must deny the Jew her Judaism. But contra Christian theology, Rosenzweig insists here that not so much a racial conflict as “the struggle for religion” erupts between the Christian separated (via the medium of Jesus) from Christianity by the Jew directly related to Judaism. For the medium of the Christ betrays the immediacy of Jesus to *his Jewish* identity. Rosenzweig concludes that the historical triumph of Christianity over the Christian (née pagan) is premised on a denial of metaphysical Judaism to the historical Jew.

Ehrenberg countered on two points. First, Rosenzweig's “new standpoint does not lie outside of the world,” since it must assert “force [*Kraft*]” to have any meaning. If God set a task “in the world” once the Christians took over for the “rebellious People Israel” then the dual covenant “makes possible a Christian fulfillment without its Christianization in a portion [*Stück*] of the world.” That is to say, Christianity is imperial and meant to encompass the entire globe. Judaism neither lives outside the world nor has

¹⁵ GS I 135. On sparing Israel see Luke 21:20, 22-23.

room to live within it. Second, the repeated “disloyalty [*Abtrünnigkeit*]” of Israel casts doubt on whether “the People Israel, participating in the election, *is* yet with God.” And if Rosenzweig finds his “force [*Kraft*]” in this “pursuit” then it would show that “God has destined only the toughest to the cognoscenti [*Bewußten*] in the People Israel.”¹⁶ Does prioritizing the elite within an exclusive group not glorify egoism? What advantage does remaining a Jew currently have in German society?

Rosenzweig admitted “a practical problem” for the individual’s belonging to Israel; but he insisted that addressing, not skirting, it *would* advance an as yet unrealized possibility. Despite Ehrenberg's assumption, Rosenzweig's remaining a Jew is not a nineteenth-century liberal choice of adopting one’s faith. Choice is available to, and incumbent on, the Christian for Christianity. The choice of converting to Christianity is for the pagan individual to make. But the Jew has no choice about Judaism, or Christian imperialism. “*Our* acceptance of Christianity presupposes ... that Christendom accepts *us*.” The Jews remain only so long as the Church permits. Choosing is Christian, and remaining is Jewish. Certainly Jewish survival has often depended on the tolerance of the Christian empire. But the independence of the Jew from the heretical imperative, the necessity to be free, promises to Rosenzweig something more. Inverting the direction of historical supersession, whatever “Israel’s existence would be for the Church,” from the Jewish perspective “we are already at the goal, you are still on the way [*wir sind schon am Ziel, ihr seid noch auf dem Weg*].” To which the Church seems to rejoin: alright, but “you are the last [of the human races] because you ... are the absolutely stubborn [*die absolut Verstockten*].” The “whereto [*wozu*]” presents Christianity with “a mystery”

¹⁶ GS I 138-40.

“insurmountable in time.” History cannot prove whether its goal was reached: if history contains its own goal, then nothing outside history measures a failure to achieve it; if the goal surpasses history, then everything inside disappears in the achievement. Because Judaism stands at the origin as an idea for which the Jews stand in the present as the foreshadowing element of the eschaton, it requires a *return* to the origin in order to reach the goal. While Jews have suffered historically for accepting their status as a chosen people (see Amos 3:2), Rosenzweig insists, they have learned since “the year 70” no longer “to hope for a single apostasy of a single reconciliation [*Versöhnung*], but only still the one great reconciliation of the last days.” The Jews in their Judaism “wait no more on prophets, but only on the last day.” The last day does not include even the person of the Messiah, because it does not include any persons who remain individual.

What role, then, does the individual play in her death and resurrection as the one-and-all? How could the absolute be relatively understood by limited beings such as humans? Rosenzweig’s worry about the individual merging with a larger totality instigated his 1914 “Atheistic Theology,” which claims that modern efforts “to understand the Divine as a self-projection of the human” domesticate the incongruity of God and a world whose nature is created and whose creatures are redeemable.¹⁷

Rosenzweig subscribed to an emerging consensus in 1914 criticizing “the end of the Life-

¹⁷ See Rosenzweig, “Atheistic Theology,” in *Franz Rosenzweig’s Philosophical and Theological Writings* [PTW], ed. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan (Hackett, 2000), 17, 23. Note Rosenzweig’s letter to Gritli 22.III.19 at <http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/1919.html>; see FRLT 30-31. See Mendes-Flohr in the *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing*, Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes, eds. (Yale, 1997), 322-326. “Philosophy is the expression of nature as created, as the locus of freedom. Revelation breaks into history and gradually absorbs philosophy, until the creation expends itself and the final redemption, the All in All, realizes itself,” write Morgan and Franks (PTW 2).

of-Jesus theology,” which had dominated scholarship in its effort since David Friedrich Strauss to place Jesus into historical context, and proposing a re-turn from historicism to metaphysics.¹⁸ The consensus was that ‘science’ fails to distinguish the Christ-figure in the Hellenistic and Persian beliefs in apotheosis from the historical character of the man Jesus; the man’s “personality remains locked within the walls of its own individuality.” A messenger like Jesus of Nazareth cannot simply bring the message of Christ.¹⁹ Indeed the link between history and metaphysics breaks over the ambiguity of finitude and infinity. To Rosenzweig, taking on a “God-ordered way of life” designates an “eternal longing” for a “transnational” significance that “loses its unqualified inner humanity” and “becomes ‘dogmatically’ authoritative again” relative to other peoples. But while “God himself, not human presumption, makes Himself dependent upon human testimony,” humanity “under the curse of historicity” is “unable to eliminate the God to whom the historicity of history is subjugated by His historical deed,” the event of revelation, for instance, the giving of Torah to Moses at Sinai. Supposedly that event provides “an absolute measure of height stands fast, outside that which rises and falls” in the course of historical change, and reveals “the God who builds a bridge between people and

¹⁸ Rosenzweig mentions Arthur Drew, *The Christ Myth* (Open Court, 1910; reprint, Prometheus, 1998), but not Albert Schweitzer; see PTW 7 n. 7, 10 n. 2.

¹⁹ David Friedrich Strauss progenitor of Life-of-Jesus theology, assumed the myth of Christ is less historically compelling than Jesus the prophet who broke with surrounding conditions, and the particularity of Jesus does not lend itself to any kind of essential universality of Christ. Rosenzweig doubted whether “a mundane and individualistic historicism could coexist with the universal scope of religion,” in David Myers, *Resisting History* (Princeton, 2003), 87. Rosenzweig’s 1914 essay arguably presages the leap over Lessing’s “ugly ditch” between faith in Christ and the history of Jesus later taken by Karl Barth’s 1919 *Epistle to the Romans*, and Rudolf Bultmann’s 1920 *History of the Synoptic Gospels* (see PTW 10, 14). For the standard account of a gap see Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (Illinois, 1996) and an alternative in Gordon E. Michalson, *Lessing's 'Ugly Ditch': a Study of Theology and History* (Penn State, 1985).

humanity,” between the chosen and the choosing. But how does the *Fluche des Geschichtlichkeit*, “a curse of contingency — of living life within the temporal borders framed by Revelation,” as David Myers puts it, allow eternal faith to abide historical time?²⁰ How can revelation be thought if it eludes the *curse of history* which otherwise grounds every figure of thinking in a context?

In 1916, Rosenstock-Huessy sent a letter exemplifying his "calendar method" on which Rosenzweig commented that in it "(because of the 'transcendental' character of time) there remains the fiction, or rather the claim, to be more than a view of the world coordinated with a view of one's life." Since the calendar is "a symptom of a people's corporate memory," as Alexander Altmann writes, Rosenzweig could imagine that church and synagogue are "two eternal dial plates under the weekly and annual pointer of ever-renewed Time." A question remains whether Rosenzweig had misunderstood Rosenstock, which I can only mention here.²¹ My paper touches on their readings of Karl Barth. Like that neo-Orthodox theologian, the early Rosenzweig opposed nineteenth century efforts to humanize Jesus, betraying the radical otherness of the Gospel message. The Gospel does not preach the equivocal nature of the world and spirit of divinity, but superiority of the latter over the former. As Barth later put it in his programmatic essay "The Word of God and the Task of Theology," "man is made to serve *God*, and not God to serve man." Especially ascription of God's revealed word to the expressions of human

²⁰ PTW 22-24. Rosenzweig wavers between historicism and absolutism; see Myers, *Resisting History*, 86-88, and between Hegelian panlogicism and historical relativism (see Casper 2002: 67). Rosenzweig wrote, the fact that "important concepts are not included in one another" means "the problems of world history have to be solved by force and by the Lord of all force" (JDC 168). He rejects the reading of *Sifre on Deuteronomy*: "if they [Israel] do the divine will, they are like stars, and if not, they are like the dust of the earth" (see PTW, 23).

²¹ JDC 93, 129, Alexander Altmann, "About the Correspondence," in JDC 44-48.

experience, however elevated, according to Barth, failed to accord divine truth its due.²²

Yet by 1922, Rosenzweig reconsidered on reading the second edition of Barth's commentary on Paul's letter to Romans.²³ It seems for Barth no so much its effect on humanity as its denial of humanity follows *theology*. Indeed, theocentrism *restricts* God to the beyond, and forbids God from becoming worldly. As Gershon Greenberg noted, "The divine essentiality that God is truth is that God reveals himself to man" in love, and that love is spread amongst humanity, rather than as an objective quality of God's essence with its subjective correlate in events shared in tandem with other people.²⁴

Revealing Natures: The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Correspondence

Rosenzweig, a nurse from 1915 and then an army regular with intermittent furloughs and hospitalizations until December 1918, engaged in voluminous correspondence, had an affair with his closest friend's wife, Gritli Rosenstock-Huessy, and composed a series of postcards that evolved into *The Star of Redemption*. By 1916, Rosenzweig viewed philosophy and revelation less as antagonists striving to replace one

²² *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Christian Kaiser, 1925): 164-165. See Randi Rashkover, *Revelation and Theopolitics: Barth, Rosenzweig, and the Politics of Praise* (T&T Clark, 2005) for an account of their symbiotic features.

²³ Rosenzweig read the *Epistle* "with curiosity at [Barth's] ability to make so much of pure negation.... His God, whose only role when he reveals himself is to permanently absent himself, should still recognize and protect against that danger." (GS I: 875). He later noted, "I used to be a Barthian ... but almost ten years ago Rosenstock surgically extracted my Barthianism from me"; GS I 893, see Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Cornell, 2007), 158.

²⁴ "The only part of our assertion of which we are certain, the only part we can prove, is that man is made nugatory, negated.... But this is only to indicate ... how God might be spoken of if man were denied. It is not however to speak of God" See Barbara Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Judah Halevi* (McGill-Queen's, 2002), 204-205, and 194-195, 381, 388-389, quoting Rosenzweig, GS I: 597, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 207-8, 295-96.

another than as partners cooperating in the advancement of what remained infinitely separate, God the Creator and the nature of creation. Rosenzweig's answer to the question of how revelation *orients* philosophy instead of getting oriented by it was formulated in this 1916-1917 correspondence with Rosenstock.

Rosenstock ignited the conversation in a letter celebrating “the individual character, i.e. the meaning of this our life” by addressing Franz with the salutation: “Dear Fellow (Jew + post-Christum natum + post-Hegel mortuum)!” In his own view Rosenstock's becoming a Christian did not obviate his being a Jew. But Rosenzweig took offense. He insisted on an irreducible difference between Christian and Jew: “You are directly hindering me from treating my Judaism in the first person, in that you call yourself a Jew.” Moreover, Rosenstock quotes an unauthorized saying of Jesus linked to Luke 6:5 which says “a man who breaks the Sabbath is blessed if he knows what he is doing, accursed if he does not.” Rosenstock might “want to Christianize the ‘eternal Jew,’” as Rosenzweig charged, and to make law-breaking compulsory in “a veritable ‘taking of the Kingdom of God by violence.’” Rosenzweig accepted “the militant Church” exercising missionary “work on individuals” — however not one who “is still a member in the body,” only someone “cut loose from his people”; not the religious, Sabbath Jew but the everyday, secular Jew. One who converts to Christianity has effectively deracinated oneself “*as a Jew*.” Specifically, Rosenstock could no longer claim the identity of a Jew if he believed that Jesus replaced such the Jewish people as a vessel transmitting divinity into nature. Thus Rosenzweig not only rescinded his personal vow to become Christian by being Jewish. He came here to render that transition impossible to anyone else. Inasmuch as “the Cross” signals “the first word of

God,” becoming Christian entails *no longer* being Jewish or Greek. These orientations are different in their fundamentals, and irreconcilable. Noting almost comical-tragically how it appears “Christianity until the Second Coming should have nothing to do but be tempted and divided from the world, and leave it to the busy and industrious People of God to do the rest,” Rosenzweig opposed “a Johannine desire to take the world for a *mundus naturaliter christianus*.” He rejected the universalizing replacement Ehrenberg and Rosenstock presumed, in theological distinction from Barth and neo-Orthodoxy.²⁵

How then do the Greek, Jewish, and Christian differ? Rosenstock proposes that whereas the Jews claim to replace nature, or paganism, with God, the Christian seeks to convert nature into God; whereas the Jews negate the world, the Christian heals it. Indeed Rosenstock strikingly considers himself “pre-Christian Jewish racial material. In my capacity for suffering and in my craving for it,” he adds, “the Jew comes out.” Presumably the Jews suffer as a result of their “stubbornness,” their refusal to go with the flow, their living for the Sabbath rather than the everyday. Yet that interpretation, as Rosenzweig counters, forces Rosenstock “to confront nature with the same either-or which is only valid for salvation [*Erlösung*]” by faith alone. More, Rosenstock’s instinct to “crave suffering” misreads Jewish stubbornness and projects onto the Jews an apparent reason for the punishment of their supposed perfidy in killing Christ.²⁶ Rosenstock’s conversion to Christianity condemns the Jews “like a [second] power that fills the world”

²⁵ See JDC 94-98, especially n. 64. Rosenzweig notes: the “distortion of the future after the Protestant manner also explains (in direct challenge to Romans 11) that queer unloading of the Church as a task onto the converted Jewish people in order that Christianity until the Second Coming should have nothing to do but be tempted and divided from the world, and leave it to the busy and industrious People of God to do the rest” (JDC 98-101).

²⁶ JDC 103-104, GS I, 245-46.

and drains its lifeblood. To Rosenzweig, the Jews do not control nature; but the Christian authorizes history. The accusation of Jews' erstwhile control of the world bespeaks a Christian wish of conversion to overtake nature and render it historical (e.g. Kant, Hegel).

Rosenstock agrees that Judaism *originally* ushered in a dispensation God to purify the world from admixtures. But, that dispensation, taking *newer* form, is evidently lost on Jews who grasp their "chosen" status and tradition to the detriment of their growth and adaptation. Only Christianity would bring Judaism back to earth. In which case, however, Rosenzweig notes ironically, "the 'daughter religion' gradually educates the world for Judaism." On the face of it, it seems to Rosenzweig, linking Rosenstock to Parson J, the Christian damns the "liberal-Jewish" person with faint praise. The claim that Christianity 'respects' Judaism "in actual practice" relegates it to the past, and in the present foments a "*hatred of the Jews.*" That hatred stems from envy. Christians envy Jews because whereas the Christian reaches God through "someone else," writes Rosenzweig, there stands "no other person between me [the Jew] and my father in heaven." Perhaps, Rosenzweig concedes, the Church would "spare" Judaism while converting the Jew. Yet however much "the Jew can afford the immediacy of God's closeness" spiritually, he or she "must pay for this blessing [Glück]" materially. To Judaism, "Christianity is like a power that fills the world"; and to Christianity, Judaism is "both the stubborn origin and the last convert." Rosenzweig sharply formulates "the final line dividing the two faiths" in the "well-worn phrase," "to hallow the name of God in the world." From their different approaches to hallowing daily life "follows all the ambiguity of Jewish life" — and "all the movement [*Bewegtheit*] of Christian life." As a Jew in the world must also "stand under these laws [*Gesetzen*]," likewise he "cannot

anxiously avoid a degree of life from outside Judaism.” Rosenzweig shows “as much as possible of [the] inner-Jewish’ [*innerjüdisch*],” though he declares that it “is hard to describe to a stranger,” indeed, a stranger who denies his own strangeness!²⁷

Rosenzweig’s October 1916 letter challenged Rosenstock to defend his position against the extremes of historicism (Lessing and Hegel) or fideism, “the paradox” (Jacobi and Kierkegaard). While Christianity overtakes paganism, it cannot dissolve philosophy. The question of nature in its origins and destiny does not find a resolution in Christianity alone, but only in its duality with Judaism. To nature accords a dual covenant. Pointedly, Rosenzweig asks Rosenstock to clarify his “idea of the relation between nature and revelation.” With evident recourse to Schelling’s philosophy Rosenstock pointedly responds that “nature and revelation” are made of “the same stuff” viewed from different angles. There is an apparent but not a substantive difference between them. Rosenstock seems to admit a natural theology. He rebukes Rosenzweig’s “Atheistic Theology” for misleadingly implying an antagonism of revelation to nature. Revelation is intimately linked to nature, however, and not isolated from it. It is *human* contrivances that are “not natural.” Yet “faith,” Rosenstock insists, “comparable to a natural force,” does not distinguish opinion and knowledge, but guides the proper stance toward the matter of “bread and wine,” or human production and consumption. As a rule, claims Rosenstock, “the more everyday the thing, the more revealing and revealed it can become [*Je alltäglicher die Sache, desto offenbar und offenbart kann werden*]” (GS I, 276). This passage cannily echoes Hölderlin’s poem *Brot und Wein* (1800/01): while ordinarily “a measure always endures, common to all,” none can foretell or forefend what “God the

²⁷ JDC 111-118, GS I, 247-57, see Dorothy Emmet, “Review of *The Star*,” in *Judaism Despite Christianity*, 55, Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions* (Wayne State, 1990), 222.

Highest has willed, who loves you so much, therefore/ Is clearer to you that the common sense of day”; but “at last a genius had come ... who named the day’s end then disappeared”; “they say rightly, he joins day with night/ Drives the heaven’s stars endlessly up and down.²⁸ For Hölderlin the “genius” who joins day and night by measuring the common up to its limit is the *poet*; for Rosenstock it is the *Christian* (as Rosenzweig’s *Star* grants).²⁹

To Rosenstock, revelation takes place in and through nature; but it surpasses a “natural understanding [*natürlicher Verstand*]” of the world. Nature, what is given necessarily, is not understood naturally. Properly understanding nature, ironically, presupposes revelation. For the natural world enjoys a connection with an infinite revelation which finite thinking obstructs or obfuscates. Rosenstock observes that the immediacy of sensation and “natural consciousness” from which Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* departs adequately “knows front and back, left and right.”³⁰ However, it remains confined by an “enclosure” which relates to the outside with no more than “analogy.” Claiming a perch at “the navel of the world, “such autonomous knowledge is without [absolute] standards, supported only by experience,” conditions, and accidents. *Natural understanding* is “a remnant without power [*kraftslose Rest*]”: what remains only after reality is bracketed, or metaphysics are limited (Kant), or subject is substantiated (Hegel) — especially as compared with revelation, which supplies a “condition from above [*von oben bedingt*].” *Revelation offers more* than natural understanding in order to enhance

²⁸ Translated by Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover, in *Slope* 23 (Spring/Summer 2006), <http://www.slope.org/archive/issue23/23chernoffhoover.html>.

²⁹ “Christus hat den Durchbruch dieser auf Erden latenten, gebundenen Kraft in den Weltenraum, gen Himmel, uns vermittelt.”

³⁰ Franks and Morgan, FRPTW, 26; see Altmann JDC 43-44 and PFR 135.

nature, not (as Judaism would seem) to deny it. The “logos” of science which “aspires to live 'without presuppositions' ... hardens ... the metaphors of the day before yesterday ... into concepts,” or “commonplaces” whose “intellectual properties” masquerade as a “concrete basis” for life. What drives natural understanding into the “stagnant and degenerate concept” is “fear for the destruction of the naïve ego, which constitutes its own standards.” In the doctrine of the savior, however, “the *Logos* is redeemed [*erlöst*] from itself, from the curse [*Fluche*] of always only being able to correct itself by itself,” from its own immanence. To Rosenstock the *curse*, which Rosenzweig had declaimed in 1914, marks not only relativism and historicism. More, it signals an immanent naturalism characterized by self-sufficiency of and indifference to life. Natural understanding thrives on the quest to take it all in by oneself irrespective of others. Once “God speaks to us with the ‘word become flesh’” and not only “the word of man” then “thought has a standard outside itself.”³¹ Leaving the curse of abstract thought and rooted in this concrete world, “all revelation is something that gives us a standard and at the same time it is a sensible, perceptible event.” Revelation is immediate and mediating, natural and supernatural. *Revelation*, as Rosenzweig would later answer Kant’s question, *is orientation within reason*.

Before Rosenzweig could articulate his point, though, Rosenstock lambasted the “naïve pride of the Jew” which “separated” the people “until the destruction of the Temple” once it is the case that “Christianity redeems the individual from family and people through the unity of all sinners.” Rosenstock, challenging Rosenzweig, does not “find in Christianity the Judaizing of the pagans.” For unlike the Jews, the “Christian ...

³¹ Cf. Karl Barth’s 1924 essay, “Word of God and Word of Man.”

does not indulge in himself.” Rosenstock charges Rosenzweig’s assumption that Judaism possesses what Christianity seeks with the sin of hubris or collective egoism.³² As Rosenstock would clarify in 1924, “by receiving commands and by being judged from outside ... being something different or special is the fundamental experience of an ‘I’” who responds to a Thou — but not of a genuine or natural We; the latter polyphony requires an additional step beyond the former dialogue (PKS 16). Not only is Jewish stubbornness tantamount to the pride of Israel in its exclusive claim to God's election, as Rosenzweig contends, Rosenstock charges that because Judaism only “knows an original union in blood,” or inheritance, the Jews harbor “indifference towards the law of growth of the united universe,” its natural evolution; or, as Dorothy Emmet wrote in an early review of *The Star*, “the synagogue has not faced this question of living in the world,” and therefore remains – but powerless.³³

Rosenstock considers the Jewish claim to Diaspora equivalent to the pagan claim to autochthony. (Rosenzweig would in *The Star* sharply distinguish Jew from pagan.) While purporting to sanctify creation through observing the Sabbath, Judaism arguably opposes a dynamic, *super*-naturalistic account of nature. And yet even Judaism cannot survive without natural experience. Rosenzweig’s remaining a Jew stands refuted by his living. For “every power must verify itself against, stand the test of, every danger [*Jede Kraft muß sich gegen jede Gefahr bewähren*]” which life determines for it. There is no

³² Among pagans and Jews “everyone aspires to be founder, father, owner, testator, ancestor, guardian, master”; each “rules a piece of the world.” Judaism is “naïve” to assert “rights in perpetuity against God, which by nature remain for posterity as properties inherited by bequest.” Only the Christian “knows a second kingdom of poverty, weakness, dependence, minority, shame, repentance, and shy childishness” (JDC 123-126).

³³ Dorothy Emmet, in JDC 59.

un-natural life for Israel, however *super*-natural faith may claim for it. Indeed “this singling out,” Rosenstock-Huessy clarified in 1924, “is the process of life itself.”³⁴ Hence, Rosenstock assures Rosenzweig, “Israel will survive all the peoples.” Yet its survival exacts the price of its originality; it has outgrown its use, and remains an atavism. “The eternal Jew is allowed to live at the cost ... [of] always borrowing everything that makes life worth living.” But “success” is not a measure of living a worthy life. Rosenstock’s criticism here resembles Paul’s view that the Jewish law as the means to achieve salvation is rendered obsolete by the Christian mission to share God’s word unconditionally.

Revelation does not oppose natural understanding, but *orients* it, claims Rosenstock.³⁵ To achieve a substantive response to Rosenstock's challenge, therefore, Rosenzweig would need to demonstrate how “Judaism also has a meaning of humanity” beyond its own confines, as Horwitz puts it.³⁶ Or whether perhaps their indifference and self-sufficiency doom the Jews to a status of irrelevance and impertinence. As Rosenstock chides his friend:

You see God with constant clarity, and so you need no mediator.... You do not know the world is movement and change. The Christian says there are day and night. You are so moonstruck that you take the sight of night for the only sight there is, and take the minimum of light, the night, for the all-inclusive idea that embraces day and night!

³⁴ PKS 26.

³⁵ “If revelation is not to be arbitrary, mysterious, and wholly unjustified to human understanding, the two cannot be so decisively separated.” Rosenstock could agree with Rosenzweig that “to prevent revelation from being arbitrary and groundless,” as Franks and Morgan write, it must be “given and not constructed, fixed and not movable.”

³⁶ See Horwitz 1988: 89.

Only in the Church does the Christian realize “the mystery of the microcosm, the infinity of the individual soul which gives rebirth to the whole macrocosm, though it functions nonetheless as a member of this great body.” This passage slyly associates his friend with an avant-garde musical piece recently debuted (1912) in Rosenstock's hometown of Berlin and known amongst the composer's German compatriots as *Mondsüchtig Pierrot*, or *Pierrot Lunaire*, setting Albert Giraud's cycle of poems with Arnold Schoenberg's innovative *Sprechstimme* or speech-singing accompanied by a small chamber orchestra; the reference also plays off a sharp contrast with Rosenzweig's restrained tastes.³⁷ Everything is at stake for Rosenzweig, who like Pierrot is either insane or inspired. If the night turns out to be day, to carry out the metaphor, then Rosenstock would have “decapitated” Rosenzweig. But if what Rosenstock takes to have become already day in fact remains only night, not because scales cover his eyes but because he is blinded by an atmospheric halo projected from his savior-hero Jesus, then Rosenzweig has a case to press.

Just as biblical scholars who might question Rosenstock's Christian apologetics, so too Rosenzweig does not consider Jewish life instrumental to reach some externally posited aim, but rather finds its performance intrinsically fulfilling. Rosenzweig confirms they are debating over “philosophy of nature” and challenges Rosenstock's assumption that nature feeds a “*rabies theologica*” with “material for parables.”³⁸ Rosenzweig judges the “fight against Judaism as Paganism” a “mistake,” asserting that Jews adopted Judaism before the pagans (*ethnoi*) acquired “paganism,” since “Heidentums” (of Arabic coinage)

³⁷ See Rosenzweig's 1928-29 reviews as “The Concert Hall on the Phonograph Record,” in Barbara Galli, *Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig* (Syracuse, 2000), 116-154.

³⁸ JDC 129-138, GS I, 280-291.

emerged alongside the concept of “nationalism.” The *nation of Israel* is not an ethnic origin, but a practical orientation; not only does it “come from God”; it will also “go to God.” In the People Israel, a Messianic God transcends even the godly world. The election of the Jews “will always remain the unique visible actual embodiment of the attained goal of the unity [*die einzige sichtbar wirkliche Verkörperung des erreichten Zieles der Einheit*] (the one people on earth, as it calls itself in the Sabbath prayer), whereas the peoples are only on the way to this desired goal” and must strive for it “to be attained.” Rosenzweig’s italicization of the German “*erreichen*” intimates the existence of an object towards which the satisfaction of a purpose could orient itself. Judaism is not merely an instrument, like Christianity, but the ultimate destination of *all* peoples’ striving. The Christians hate the Jews who have arrived at salvation, and no longer covet survival.³⁹ But Rosenzweig counters: Christianity is “a ‘Judaizing of the pagans.’”⁴⁰ For paganism grounds the nation in arbitrary, conflicting points of origin, whereas the Church orients history around the destiny of “something unique [*etwas Einzigartiges*]”: the “one people” of heaven on earth. Since Rosenstock would “unwillingly ethnicize [*unwillkürlich zu ethnisieren*]” the Jews, he fails to de-naturalize Judaism. For the People Israel makes concrete the idea of God's uniqueness, which transcends nature through creation.

Rosenzweig favorably cites Cicero, Augustine, and Luther to argue that in Judaism salvation is survival, sacrifice is sustaining, and the Jews represent the destiny that marks the relevance of Judaism for the nations. Cicero had granted to the State the purpose of its own “self-sustenance [*Selbsterhaltung*] (salus)” and the maintenance of its

³⁹ See JDC 112.

⁴⁰ See JDC 120-122.

citizens' "fidelity to contracts [Vertragstreue] (fides)" which "inevitably conflict."
Augustine's *civitas Dei* renders "impossible any conflict between salvation [*Heil*] and faith [*Glauben*]." Rosenzweig underscores the point in his approval of Isaiah 7:9 in Luther's translation: "If you do not believe, you do not abide."⁴¹ Due to its *remaining* by *offering*, Judaism repudiates "secularizing" the link between salvation and survival which results in "nationalism today," and tomorrow "imperialism." Withstanding siege, Jerusalem's defenders "hoped" for a "miracle." In order to prove that "faith" "anchored" in an "abiding reality" is not an artificial "autonomy," Rosenzweig "would have to show [Rosenstock] Judaism from within, that is, to be able to show it to you hymnically [*hymnisch*]."⁴²

Here Rosenzweig goes to the central problem of sacrifice. He compares Agamemnon's conflict of interest between duty and desire, leadership and self-interest, with Abraham's willingness (in Genesis 22) to forego his inheritance by sacrificing "[his] existence in [his] people." Whereas Agamemnon was able to sacrifice his own for the sake of his people, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his legacy for the sake of his loyalty. The binding of Isaac aligns Judaism (and Christianity) against paganism. The monotheists strive "for the redemption of the world." Although the sacrifice of Isaac on

⁴¹ The verse links in the Hebrew root *amn* the words "trust, believe" (Exodus 4:31, 14:31, 19:19, etc), "made firm, sure" (Isaiah 22:23-25, 33:16, etc), and "confirmed, established" (1 Samuel 2:35, 3:20, etc); see the note at *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson, 2004), 53.

⁴² He wrote in June 1914: "Auch wenn ich rituell lebte ... ich jetzt Jude bin" (GS I, 161). Upon conquering Carthage in 146 BCE, the wife of its failed defending general Hasdrubal cursed her husband's surrender to cast herself and her two sons into a pyre, followed by numerous Romans soldiers who had previously deserted and turned coat, -- this led the conquering Roman consul Scipio Aemilianus to exclaim the Homeric line which prophesied "the day shall come when sacred Troy shall fall, and King Priam and all his warrior people with him."

Mt. Moriah and Christ on Mt. Golgatha are similar, a “remainder of faith [*das Bleibende des Glaubens*]” takes each in an opposite direction. Whereas in Judaism the sacrificed child saves the family, in Christianity the sacrificed man saves humanity. Jews call ‘Israel’ family, and the Christian calls ‘Israel’ humanity. As a result, the individual Jew — be it Abraham, Isaac, or Sarah — suffers inasmuch as belonging to the family can risk exclusion from wider social currents. “We are hungry for life because we must live,” Rosenzweig concedes in defense of his marriage, military service, university studies, etc. But, he adds, this “unethical [*unsittlichen*] life” stands alongside “a pure inner Jewish life in all that serves the maintenance of the people, of its 'life' insofar as its is not purchased from without, but must be worked out from within.” Only the “*Verwaltungsarbeit*” of Judaism would “build up the Jews into a united whole and maintain them in their form of life ... plain and simple ... [to] work as a ferment on Christianity and through it on the world.”⁴³ Not the order of reason, but the orderliness of the hymn constitutes Jewish ordinariness. “How far the Jew takes part in the life of the people is something he does not prescribe for himself; they prescribe it for him. For individuals it is very much a question of tact.” In response to conscription, for instance, Rosenzweig volunteered in the Red Cross, since remaining a Jew did not preclude expressing “gratitude towards German culture.” But then volunteering for artillery service he considered an “unsavory act,” putting self-preservation ahead of family: indeed, he was ironically gunning for (Jewish) family across state lines, as it were.

Sustaining sacrifice requires *tactfulness*. The Jew necessarily remains bound to Judaism, but has the capacity of reshaping it through “the defining of what is central and

⁴³ See Dorothy Emmet, JDC 63 n. 29.

what is peripheral.” Does family or state take precedence in the moment? To Rosenzweig “it lies within my power to determine whether I as an individual take upon myself the metaphysical destiny” — “the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven” — set before the Jewish people, “whether I want to take the natural call up into the sphere of metaphysical choice.” Neither Christianity nor Judaism is *natural*; each has its unique relation to the natural world. Remaining a Jew does not trivialize natural life, but ritually (hymnically) unifies diversity, whereas Christianity could so historically (eschatologically). The Jews, “alienated” from current affairs, represent the “memorial of [Christian] incompleteness.” In short, Jewish redemption sustains sacrifice through the family whereas Christian salvation serves sacrifice to the state.

But, Rosenstock counters, Rosenzweig has “confused Christianity with the nations.”⁴⁴ Rosenstock notes that the “Old Testament” was replaced almost as soon as it was written. Hence the political and ethnic forms of “Zionism” are no “accident” precisely because “Israel’s time as the people of Bible has gone by.” Rosenstock claims that what remains of the Jews is only their ethnicity, but not a living ethos. Rosenstock acutely observes: “perhaps we are again entering on an epoch of races (white, black, yellow).” But to his mind that constitutes a regression. At present the human race stands at the point where ethnos counts less than ethos. “Today there are States and the Church where formerly there were peoples and the Synagogue.” It would seem the historical concepts of Republic and Election “both remain only so that they may be allowed to die.” Therefore, The “abstract splitting of ideas” in “Hegelian” fashion would no longer suffice to explain the relations of “Nature, Mind, and Soul,” the “kingdoms on earth.” “The day

⁴⁴ Letter dated November 19, 1916 at JDC 139-45, GS I: 298-302.

of the eternal Jew beckons to its close.” What remains undone is “to translate Christianity for the single isolated individual who can be anything,” pagan, Jew, or Christian, out of choice. Thereby Rosenstock not only discounts Judaism as an ethos but also Christianity as an ethnos. What we may call perhaps Rosenstock’s post-Christianity presumes to settle the contest between every the nationality of peoples and the individuality of persons. Rosenstock calls Rosenzweig to repent, for the Christian is through “misery not elect, but redeemed.”

Rosenzweig responded to his friend’s charge that Jews maintain the hatred of Jews because of the very idea of a Jewish People retains an outmoded ethnic particularity, with the counter-charge that Christianity disdains and seeks to dominate ethnicity but cannot eradicate it from nature. “I do not identify Christianity with the nations (*ethnoi*),” he wrote, but with a transnational Empire “over against” which “Judaism identifies itself with itself.”⁴⁵ Its unique integrity preserves the Jewish People against efforts to assimilate or absorb them. That very claim to uniqueness irritated Rosenstock, who countered that emancipation from ethnic exclusivity advances human growth, and beyond. He asserts, moreover, that Rosenzweig makes the same error of historicism, relativizing each to its own.⁴⁶ But, Rosenzweig counters, Rosenstock’s “lyrical” approach “forms a concept of the whole” and then tacks on mythical details. Rosenzweig prefers to view history “with the heads of all involved” than from an esoteric point of view. The “*Lebendige*” constitutes the “*Augenblick*” in which “it expresses itself.” This “dialogue” constitutes “the whole truth.” Hence, the personal “confession”

⁴⁵ Letter dated November 30, 1916 at GS I: 302-306.

⁴⁶ “Man, how you treat History! How you see everything as isolated, as individuals, where I see only the branches of a mighty tree” (JDC 127).

may “turn out to be the parliamentary debates of the 'great day' of world history.” Because “the unity of mankind” is “symbolized” by “the ‘first day’” and “confirmed [bewährt] by “the ‘last day.’” The ““before”” of “logic and the philosophy of nature” must link to the ““after”” of “civilization and theology.” The intervention of ““middling things”” demand attention as evidence of history. As Franks and Morgan suggest, the situation that invites “danger” also affords “opportunity.”⁴⁷ The choice rests with the Christian individual, but as a result life is enjoyed and suffered by Jewish people.

Rosenzweig agrees that the Old Testament is no longer what it once was, and suggests we have entered a penultimate stage in history.⁴⁸ This age before the end ironically requires “the emancipated naked Jew” to *choose* Judaism to become a member of the Jewish people, a participant in Judaism, which has chosen him or her in any case, returning full circle to link end with origin.⁴⁹ But *no land properly belongs* to the Jewish people. For “Judaism is the only point of contraction and of limitation,” the point at which the edge of the world of before and after comes to an end in the absolute, or the ultimate reaches beyond its measure. Judaism purveys no natural borders, but only a spiritual limit, the consummation of matter. Judaism offers “the guarantee” that a

⁴⁷ “There is danger because during the Petrine and Pauline ages, the Jew is protected by the dogma of the stubborn Jew whose conversion comes only at the end, but now that post-Christian nationalism has emerged, this protection ceases to exist, which makes the residual resentment of the stubborn Jew more destructive.” Yet opportunity remains because “without its previous contrasts [with the pagan nations], Christian identity now depends on Judaism” (Morgan and Franks, 41 citing JDC 129-140, JDC 160).

⁴⁸ The Old Testament “will disappear so long as this Johannine epoch of Christianity, which began in 1789, endures.” For more on the Johannine church, see Rosenzweig’s Feb 1916 letter at GS I: 185, 30 Nov 1916 to Rosenstock.

⁴⁹ Zionism, reacting to the deracination of the Jews, by contrast, is merely “an attempt to take the Kingdom of Heaven by force,” though it is perhaps instrumentally “necessary to maintain the dynamic life of a people cut off (exiled!) from the life of the world” (JDC 158-61).

Christian Empire saves *humanity* in all its resplendent differences. For, Rosenzweig adds, “the Anastasia of the City is not immortality [*Unsterblichkeit*], but inability to die.” Empires are continual, but they are not eternal. “Everything must vanish in order to become everything; [Judaism] alone must remain [*bleiben*] (it must become itself, identify with itself). ‘We are what we are, but we are Jews,’ runs the catch of a little Galician song with its illogical logic.” The “*but*” or *despite* expresses less defiance than hopefulness. Indeed Christianity and Judaism share, Rosenzweig adds, ““something in common”” only “against paganism and ‘natural religion,’” namely, “the altogether otherworldly attitude of the soul that yet breathes the world with every breath” and exhales the name of God in praise, as in a hymn. “Revelation means that *overshadowing* of the world by another world [*Überschatten der Welt mit Überwelt*]”; and the “essence of revelation” is “to bring an absolute symbolic ordering to history.” Thus Judaism and Christianity enliven “the objective presupposition of that attitude of the soul”; “only for Jews and Christians exists that firm orientation [*Orientierung*] of the world in space and time.” But Rosenstock, finally, rejects the presumption that Judaism has any such “orientation” in the manner of Christianity, if only because what sounds to Rosenzweig like ‘family’ sounds to Rosenstock like ‘nation,’ even ‘race,’ or at least tribe. Hence Rosenstock reproaches Rosenzweig for displaying “a triumph of Hölderlin’s ‘at the height of consciousness to evade consciousness.’”⁵⁰

If Rosenzweig’s Jewish family saves the Christian empire from its pagan roots in hero-worship, then Rosenstock’s Christian individual saves the Jewish nation from its exclusion of the universally pagan. Rosenzweig and Rosenstock disagreed on the ways

⁵⁰ JDC 164-166, GS I: 315-317, and Rosenzweig’s June 26 1914 diary entry (GS I: 164).

in which revelation and nature connect and conflict. Rosenstock's theological dispensationalism indicated that the personal choice and freedom to convert, renew, reorient oneself enabled him or her to liberally dispense with nation-states. Rosenzweig could agree that Christianity surpasses nation-states, but only because it moves *toward* Judaism, not away from it. Rosenstock's view rested on a universal history in which human nature developed from multiple national identities. Rosenzweig sensed a threat of this indifference to alternative histories in which the same nation hangs in the balance of divergent quasi-natural, or ethnic, kinds. Rosenzweig did not portray Judaism "as in a hymn," but he did show the 'rays' shining outward from its core. Since this "world" is *inaccessible* to any "philosophically systematic account," everything hinges on the revelation of a limited perspective toward the whole on which thought depends but which it does not comprehend or even access. As Rosenzweig wrote in early 1917, "Every act should be performed as though all eternity depended on it.... Only from life leads the springboard into the beyond; death, that has not lived, would certainly not be able to become undead [*unsterblich*]." ⁵¹

Revolutionary and Messianic Results, 1917-1925

World War broke out in summer 1914 and Rosenzweig, on completing *Hegel und der Staat*, expressed disappointment over the tragic failure of naturalism, systematization, and States. ⁵² By war's end Rosenzweig's Hegelianism (coinciding with his rediscovery of Schelling) had soured even more. On the eve of the Weimar Republic, Rosenzweig's

⁵¹ Citing Ecclesiastes 4:3 at FRLT 47, GS I, 344-46.

⁵² See *HuS* II, 246. See Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (California, 2005), 110-111, Myriam Bienenstock, "Die Pflicht des Erinnerns: bei Franz Rosenzweig," 148-49.

position was taking firm hold, to which Rosenstock would soon respond. In the 1919/20 “Foreword” to his *Hegel* book Rosenzweig lamented his first book’s belated publication. The book’s goal was to open the “limited Hegelian conception of the state” onto the “spacious” expanse of Bismarck's unification. Due to the war, “things worked out differently.”⁵³ That conscience would triumph instead of power was disproven by war.

After the Battle at Verdun had amounted to an unfathomable loss of lives, Rosenzweig’s 1917 essay “*Globus*” addressed growing threats of nationalism and racism that Rosenstock had bemoaned. Its main part, “*Ökumene*,” argued that Christian ecumenicalism maintained an internal dialectic between its national-ethnic and universal-cosmopolitan tendencies. With the adoption of a frank *Realpolitik*, the Christian Church took the lead in history. It meant attaching the nation directly to the *Volk* via Empire or State. Rosenzweig worries that *Volk* is not, like Israel, a particular that wishes to remain different, but a species that wishes to become the genus of humanity. *Realpolitik* dialectically turns Christianity into the world-historical mission of global domination. There is only a topological difference between a *Weltstaat* and a *Staatenwelt*. Yet Israel stands out from the globe, by itself. Rosenzweig’s disbelief in “the eternally separate spheres of culture” did not allow a doctrinaire proclamation that God “created only one heaven and one earth.”⁵⁴ Rosenzweig sent the manuscript to Rosenstock only to receive a sharp dismissal of the essay for its atavistic historicist methodology. Conceding the point, Rosenzweig composed “*Thalatta*,” echoing the Greek cry for ‘the sea, to home,’ which sought to limit the expanding boundaries of nation-states. The motives of agents,

⁵³ PTW, 74.

⁵⁴ See Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism,” in PFR, 148-149, 154, and GS III: 348, 367.

even world-historical figures have little bearing on a history that yields mainly “unforeseen results.” As World War I (before the entrance of America and Japan) suggested to Rosenzweig, “still the earth is in truth -- not a sphere [*Kugel*],” a smooth surface which putatively conjoins its integrated parts. A short piece titled “*Zur Einführung*,” introducing the two essays, extends the metaphorical contrasts of the smooth surface of nature and the rocky crevices of history. The metaphysical warrant for the historical account it offers arguably breaks with the Hegelianism to which he ascribed historicism. The break marks Rosenzweig's distinctive thought on the *literal* nature of human history, which began with a claim on the earth. “The first *Mensch* who demarcated a piece on the ground of the earth to its possession inaugurated history.” Subsequent history includes the “constantly renewed interweaving of mine, yours, and his; and, dialectically, the ever more inclusive shaping of I and Thou relation out the undifferentiated chaos of the It.” It is no surprise that “between each morning and its evening the boundaries move over the ground and give to questioners the answer, how high the sun stands over the sky of history”; that is, the gods shine on the prosperous, and to the victors go the spoils. “Limitation [*Begrenztheit*] is [the earth's] nature [*Natur*], impartiality only its final goal”; more, “the absence of limits remains the earth's final goal.” As opposed to the territories carving up the ground [*Boden*], “in the sea, nature presents to man the image of unity which should inspire him in the difficult work of his world-historical daily productivity to create unity upon the shore.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ GS III: 313-14; see Mendes-Flohr (PFR, 150, 155) paraphrasing the intervening sentences: “Just as the first bounded I of history leads to the first bounded We of history, the unbounded We at the end of history will correspond to the unbounded deepening of the I, which will mark the last moment of history.”

But the force of Rosenzweig's program to save the individual from absorption into the whole, to counter "reduction of the manifold to one principle" as Amos Funkenstein has put it, crystallized in the October 18, 1917 letter he later called the "Germ-cell [*Urzelle*] of *The Star of Redemption*."⁵⁶ It marked the step towards writing *The Star* in response to Rosenstock's challenge: *Who is an individual Jew* when the individual is a Christian and the Jew is the member of a post-religious and post-racial historical revolution of humanity? From late 1916 until late 1918, the *Urzelle* and letters sent by Rosenzweig to his circle of close friends explored how the unique individual resists absorption into a totality despite the identity of being and thinking in the principle of the one-all. Indeed, his reply to Rosenstock's question about "the relation of creation and revelation" came to Rosenzweig in October 1917 while marching through Macedonian hills.⁵⁷ Its fruits were the so-called "germ cell of the *Star*," focusing on the question: How does revelation separate from and relate to the natural understanding tracking creation (of which reason is one kind alongside the more basic emotion)? At the heart of *The Star of Redemption* would beat the pulse of revelation. Revelation throbbing at its heart, the *Star*'s juices would presumably flow through the world, from creation and into redemption. This raises the question of how revelation could synch up with the creation it presupposes (or knows) and the redemption it promises (or imagines)? A system consists of being all in one and one for all. To the extent that system takes Hegelian form, "truth could only be that which surrounds the totality of being, that which

⁵⁶ Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 266.

⁵⁷ See Rosenzweig's 22 August 1922 letter in Martin Buber *Briefwechsel* (Lambert Schneider, 1973), II: 117-18.

accounts for the ensemble of reality.”⁵⁸ Structured by the principle of the identity of identity and difference, a true system would bring the real and the rational together into one being. On the other hand, revelation does not so much permit as demand a response by an irreducible individual incommensurate with any other(s). Revelation presents a choice to decide whom one will become, to remain one whom remains in the sense of a remainder, what is left out, possibly even brushed aside.⁵⁹

Given the part-whole conundrum evinced in Rosenzweig’s correspondence with Rosenstock, no longer could Rosenzweig assume as he had in 1914 that revelation commands “unwillingly” submitting to God’s word in opposition “‘his drives’ [*seinen Trieben*]” expressed in the world. Revelation surely could not negate or nullify creation. Rosenzweig then made a statement that reverberates in many directions, inasmuch as what lies outside the circle, metaphysically, now becomes its inert center, historically drawing into itself that which lies between it and the beyond. He wrote, “Revelation is orientation [*Offenbarung ist Orientierung*].” Orientation is the outgrowth or the development of the revelation that grounds and exceeds it.⁶⁰ In the orientation of revelation, rationality gets its rationale. He had found a “philosophical Archimedean point” to judge whether “one could mark off from all characteristically human knowledge

⁵⁸ Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation* (Wayne State, 1992), 37, and GS III: 125-38.

⁵⁹ “It is up to me to decide if, as an individual, I want to take upon myself the metaphysical destiny to which I have been called by my birth ... and thereby lift up this natural vocation into the sphere of metaphysical choice” (Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, 692; cited by Mosès, 36).

⁶⁰ “Following revelation there is an Above and Below in nature - ‘Heaven’ and ‘Earth’ - which is real, and can no longer be relativized ... and a real firm Earlier and Later in time.... In the ‘natural’ world ... the point where I happen to be is the center of the universe; in the space-time world of revelation the center is fixed, and my movements do not alter it.” See PTW 49-50, GS III: 125-126; JDC 43-44, GS I: 357-359, *Briefe* 710, GS I: 256/JDC, 117, GS I: 276/JDC, 119-20. See Altmann (JDC 43-44) on Rosenzweig’s letter 28 October 1918 (JDC 118-23), and Mosès, 34.

the boundaries of revelation.” While “‘natural’” space and time delimit the “middle” in which “I happen to be ([*man is the measure of all things*]),” revelation marks the “middle [as] an immovably fixed point.”⁶¹ Revelation does not oppose natural understanding or sense experience that propels life into more abstract comprehension.

Rosenzweig noted the influence of Rosenstock’s 1916 letter on the concept of *Sprachdenken* that informs Rosenzweig’s 1919/1920 *Star of Redemption*. “Bound to speech, truth is grounded in contingent, temporally discrete experience (*Erfahrung*).”⁶² More, in the figure of a six-pointed star Rosenzweig designs a reply to the system of belief sketched by Rosenstock in 1916. The Star serves as “counterpart to the [cross - drawn figuratively] of reality (*Kreuz der Wirklichkeit*).” The Jewish “core” of the Star of Redemption contracts inward to activate its own source of power, while the Christian “rays” of the Star spread outward to illumine, or convert, the darkest reaches of the universe. The “eternal life” of the Jews is persistent, extending beyond the end of time whereas the “eternal way” of Christianity is pervasive, reaching across space.⁶³

In his riposte to *The Star*, Rosenstock comments on the soul’s “powers [Gewalten]” midway through his 1924 paper. Up to this point Rosenstock’s paper has demonstrated that dividing the “I” into spirit and matter, mind and body cannot add up to the soul. That is because soul is not so much as substance or a process as it is a relation. The person is “*first a ‘you’ to ... something else.*” Hence rather than “confuse the ability to speak with the necessity to speak,” Rosenstock prefers the relation of the “volunteer”

⁶¹ *Franz Rosenzweig’s ‘New Thinking’*, ed Alan Udoff and Barbara Galli, 45-46, *GS III* 125, *PTW* 63-64, and *Star of Redemption* 187. Rosenzweig differs from Rosenstock-Huessy insofar as revelation is not a “midpoint” which situates a thing in time, but a prick that punctures time, interrupting the endurance of creation.

⁶² Mendes-Flohr, *PFR*, 10; see *FRLT* 200-201.

⁶³ See *JDC* 156, Zank 2003: 85. See Altmann, *JDC* 45.

who signs up for what happens. To make the point, he introduces a “grammar” of the soul, which delineates the modes of relation between oneself and others in and through language, its tenses, voices, moods, and persons.⁶⁴ This grammar keeps ability and necessity separate but related. The affirmation of the volunteer is neither defiant nor permissive since, unlike volunteering, “it only takes a part of me to contradict a specific order.” The volunteer participates in eternity here and now. In any case, “a living person perceives out of fear, out of hope.” Since it constantly “faces the either-or of dangerous decisions” regarding its own status in life, the soul needs its scientific study to begin where “the exceptions, the crises become explainable.”⁶⁵ A person’s life makes sense or gains meaning from crises that transform it, not from the stability it attains momentarily. The advantage of this approach is that it does not build a unity from its parts but, rather, “the unity itself invests the stages [of life] with sense and meaning.” To Rosenstock, each stage of living also involves “resisting” it, like a child who wishes he were older already and an adult who wishes she were younger again. “Each stage of life threatens us – namely, our soul – just as much as it molds us.” To fully embrace the risk naturally involved, the soul “acts as a *thou*” and not as an “I” itself.

What does it mean for an agent to represent itself as a “thou” in a field of action it masters? Rosenstock does not isolate “thou” from ‘I’ and ‘it-s’; each remains a grammatical aspect of speech. His question about grammar and its transformation of soul is: how is it that “man grows” – not only changes but also evolves, not only persists but also revolves? Rosenstock distinguishes “superficial associations” and “congregation [*Gemeinde*].” The latter survives the former’s upheavals and saves humanity. Recurrent

⁶⁴ Grammar is “the discipline of changing from one form into another” (PKS 16, 19).

⁶⁵ PKS 27-39.

“catastrophes” life war and economic recession cause life to “simply disintegrate”: the example is November 9, 1918. He worries about the current “mendacity” and “political evil” wherein dread and terror in search of “power” have lost their genuine sources of “strength.” (In an aside that could well illustrate the medium of communications technology, or talk radio, “People can’t overcome strife, hate, and curses by talking about things ... [since] the problems just keep eating away at everybody.”) In 1924 the question hung over Germans: Are we a community? The answer is yes *only* if participating members say “you” to each other. Genuine community does not simply aggregate atoms but embodies a mutual “trusting.” In community the person enjoys the “confidence” of others “uniting with it in fear and hope, in the ability to suffer in the face of death.” The primordial *and* consummate “we” is exemplified in “bodies that pray,” in “the praying congregation.”⁶⁶ Grammar will “test existing communities to see if they are healthy.” They must remain capable of growth, if not necessary growing at every instant.

Rosenstock does not consider revolutions permanent, but decisive. It would require the healthiness of a congregation (however large or small) to rescue self (which it includes) and society (which encompasses it) *from themselves*, not to suppress or inflame them but *to learn and grow from their deviations and disputations*. Community needs appropriate “sacrifice.” Willingness to exchange oneself for another, like soldiers on the battlefield, is not a sustainable sacrifice: necessary perhaps, but not sufficient. As Rosenstock argues, the person “is not a ‘medium,’ not a means” for the construction of community, but a volunteer in it. Militaries and bureaucracies are scarcely models of

⁶⁶ “A ‘we’ doesn’t just cover up a bundle of identical, uniform ‘I-s’ ... [or even] the bonds between ‘you-s’ and ‘I-s’ ... [but] in the original plural, a piece of the world – that is of some third person – has been fused together with pieces of ‘you-s’ and ‘I-s.’ Primal grammar fuses God, man, and world into a resounding we.”

community; on the other hand, not even dialogue or revelation is an instrument for the achievement of community. Community instead weaves together these voices, tenses, and moods into something, so long as a person “participates” and joins in with the “inspired rhythm” which carries, or translates, the soul across ‘I’ and ‘it’ and ‘you.’ In this manner, speech may well engage hope and fear, thought and sensuality, together into the project of “forgetting ourselves” — not only self and society, but family, ethnicity, even humanity. Sustaining sacrifice requires tactfulness in sensing how to transform singularity, duality, plurality, whatever came before and comes next. The effort constitutes “a venture” over the horizon.

Rosenzweig finally countered Rosenstock in his 1925 essay, “The New Thinking.”⁶⁷ That essay seeks to replace traditional philosophy or “old thinking” with a new thinking of tradition, which precedes even ‘critical’ thought.⁶⁸ Since tradition lives in time and with the other, Rosenzweig adds in a twist on Rosenstock’s 1924 conclusion, the risk of politics is just a hope for the Messiah. It is the case both that the (Christian) individual can choose to sacrifice Judaism to changing historical demands for decision and that the (Jewish) people must survive Christianity through carefully protected, pruned recitations of trust. “The messianic theory of knowledge which weighs truths according to the price of their verification and the bond that they institute among human beings ... the way leads over those truths for which man is willing to pay [money], to those he cannot verify in any other way than with the sacrifice of his life, and finally to those

⁶⁷ Franz Rosenzweig’s ‘New Thinking’, 67-102, *GS IV*: 139-161.

⁶⁸ “The new thinking knows, just like the age-old thinking of healthy human understanding, that it cannot cognize independently of time ... and the other.” This reference to “healthy human understanding” refers to his 1923 *Das Büchlein vom Gesunden und Kranken Menschenverstand* (Joseph Melzer, 1964), which probably influenced Rosenstock’s 1924 paper.

whose truth can be verified only by risking the life of all generations.” What distinguishes Judaism from Christianity is that Jews momentarily foretell the Messiah’s arrival, whereas a Christian mourns the Messiah’s tragic passing and celebrates the Messiah’s comic return. The ambiguous relation and separation of Judaism and Christianity make it seem to Rosenzweig, as profound as it is perverse, that Jewish People emulate and prepare the finality of death within the midst of life. Death is just one more part of life, albeit the part that confirms the worthiness of living.

In sum, Rosenzweig’s liberal assumptions about a theology that admits multiple religious identities stand alongside his conservative leanings with respect to traditional, even tribal ethnic identities; meanwhile, Rosenstock’s conservative theology of a universal church stands alongside his liberal politics of the human race that cannot reduce into ethnicities.