

Rosenzweig Jahrbuch / Rosenzweig Yearbook 3

Die Idee Europa / The Notion of Europe

# Rosenzweig Jahrbuch / Rosenzweig Yearbook

Im Auftrag der Internationalen Rosenzweig-Gesellschaft  
herausgegeben von

Martin Brassler (Luzern)

in Verbindung mit

Myriam Bienenstock (Paris)

Bob Gibbs (Toronto)

Gesine Palmer (Berlin)

Jules Simon (El Paso/Texas)

Yossi Turner (Jerusalem)

Wissenschaftlicher Beirat:

Yehoyada Amir (Jerusalem)

Luc Anckaert (Antwerpen)

Leora Batnitzky (Princeton/New Jersey)

Bernhard Casper (Freiburg i. Br.)

Francesco Paolo Ciglia (Pescara)

Leonard H. Ehrlich (Amherst/Massachusetts)

Albert H. Friedlander (London) א"י

Eveline Goodman-Thau (Jerusalem/Kassel)

Heinz-Jürgen Görtz (Hannover)

Yudith K. Greenberg (Winter Park/Florida)

William W. Hallo (Hamden/Connecticut)

Rivka Horwitz (Jerusalem) א"י

Ze'ev Levy (Kibbuz Hama'apil)

Reinhold Mayer (Tübingen)

Paul Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem/Chicago)

Stéphane Mosès (Paris)

Norbert Samuelson (Tempe/Arizona)

Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik (Kassel)

Harold Stahmer (Gainesville/Florida)

Clemens Thoma (Luzern)

Rosenzweig Jahrbuch /  
Rosenzweig Yearbook 3

**Die Idee Europa /  
The Notion of Europe**

Gedruckt mit Unterstützung folgender Institutionen  
Academy for Jewish Philosophy  
Forschungskommission der Universität Luzern  
Posen Foundation

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier (säurefrei)  
Printed on acid-free paper

Originalausgabe

Alle Rechte vorbehalten – Printed in Germany  
© Verlag Karl Alber GmbH Freiburg/München 2008  
[www.verlag-alber.de](http://www.verlag-alber.de)  
Satz: SatzWeise, Föhren  
Druck und Bindung: AZ Druck und Datentechnik, Kempten  
[www.az-druck.de](http://www.az-druck.de)  
ISBN 978-3-495-46403-8

# Inhalt / Content

<i>Martin Brassler (Luzern)</i>	
Einführung / Introduction . . . . .	9
Inhaltsangaben / Abstracts . . . . .	11
<b>Aufsätze / Essays</b>	
<i>Władysław Bartoszewski (Warschau)</i>	
Europe as a Cultural Junction. Some Thoughts on European Heritage and Future . . . . .	19
<i>Avi Primor (Herzlyia)</i>	
The Relations between Israel and Europe . . . . .	28
<i>Fania Oz-Salzberger (Haifa / Monash)</i>	
On Rosenzweig, Israelis and Europe Today . . . . .	38
<i>Eveline Goodman-Thau (Jerusalem / Kassel)</i>	
Truth, Time and the Other in Europe. Levinas' Ethical Theory of Knowledge from the Sources of Judaism . . . . .	51
<i>S. Daniel Breslauer (University of Kansas)</i>	
Franz Rosenzweig and the Development of Postmodern Jewish Ethics . . . . .	71
Rosenzweig Yearbook 3	5

*Zoltan Tarr / Judith Marcus (New York)*

Georg Lukács – Philosoph und Jude im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts. Notizen zu einer exemplarischen Biographie . . . 98

*Ezra Tzfatya (Hanover, New Hampshire)*

Living the Truth of a Free Europe. Community, Philosophy, and Responsibility in the Writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin . . . . . 114

*Francesco Paolo Ciglia (Chieti-Pescara)*

Zwischen homerischem und biblischem Weltbild.  
Rosenzweigs Europa-Gedanke . . . . . 127

## Interview / Interview

*Guy Miron (Jerusalem)*

The Jewish Presence in Europe. An Interview Conducted by Dr. Yossi Turner . . . . . 143

## Diskussion: Der postmoderne Paulus / Discussion: Postmodern Paul

*Gesine Palmer (Berlin)*

Thinking to Stay. Franz Rosenzweig's Anti-Conversion and the New Pauliners . . . . . 157

## Dokumente / Documents

*Wolfgang D. Herzfeld (Ahrensburg)*

Franz Rosenzweig und Siegfried A. Kaehler.  
Stationen einer deutsch-jüdischen Beziehung . . . . . 167

*Franz Rosenzweig, Adele Rosenzweig, Siegfried A. Kaehler*  
 Briefe, ediert von Wolfgang D. Herzfeld . . . . . 196

*Franz Rosenzweig*  
 Die Leitsätze des Baden-Badener Kreises und das Referat  
 von Franz Rosenzweig auf der Tagung vom 9. Januar 1910  
 mit dem Titel »Das 18. Jahrhundert in seinem Verhältnis  
 zum 19ten und zum 20ten« . . . . . 240

**Buchbesprechungen / Book reviews**

Markus Kartheiner. Heterogenität. Politische Philosophie  
 im Frühwerk von Leo Strauss, München 2006  
 (*Ingrid Anderson*) . . . . . 255

Nathan Peter Levinson. Widerstand und Eigensinn.  
 Sechs jüdische Lehrer: Jesus-Jeschua, Martin Buber, Franz  
 Rosenzweig, Leo Baeck, Joseph Carlebach, Abraham Joshua  
 Heschel. Vorträge und Aufsätze, Berlin 2006  
 (*Regina Burkhardt*) . . . . . 259

Alexander García Düttmann. The Gift of Language.  
 Memory and Promise in Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger, and  
 Rosenzweig, Syracuse 2000 (*Michele Del Prete*) . . . . . 265

Franz Rosenzweig. Globus. Per una teoria storico-  
 universale dello spazio. A cura di Francesco Paolo Ciglia.  
 Traduzione di Stefania Carretti, Genova-Milano 2007  
 (*Michele Del Prete*) . . . . . 268

Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik. Rosenzweig im  
 Gespräch mit Ehrenberg, Cohen und Buber,  
 Freiburg i. Br. 2006 (*Josiah Simon*) . . . . . 273

Renate Schindler. Zeit, Geschichte, Ewigkeit  
 in Franz Rosenzweigs »Stern der Erlösung«, Berlin 2007  
 (*José Andrés Ancona Quiroz*) . . . . . 283

Inhalt / Content

Autorenverzeichnis / Authors Index . . . . . 287

Hinweise / References . . . . . 294

## Einführung / Introduction

Franz Rosenzweig renewed his Jewishness after a long and hard process – but his roots in the Europe of his days had always been deep and strong. To leave Europe was never a possibility and in fact, on the brink of the Shoah, it was difficult to convince his wife Edith to leave the country. Like many others, she could not imagine that such a catastrophe would happen in the country of Goethe and Schiller. Rosenzweig's thinking was quite similar to this. His rootedness in the best of European traditions was part of his life – and it became part of his arguments against Zionists. For him, Europe was a homeland for Jews unlike any other in the entire world. Until the very end of his life, he remained faithful to his hope that Europe would become the heartpiece of a global evolution towards humanism and tolerance. In this sense Europe was the best place to live for the Jews.

In the last 80 years, much of the world has changed, and today Europe has become a great player in world politics. But the question still remains as it did for Rosenzweig at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: does Europe have the special role of establishing humanism and tolerance all over the world? And even more relevant for readers of the Rosenzweig Yearbook: what is the role of Europe from a Jewish perspective? And still more deeply: what is the true notion of Europe today? The following texts will provide several perspectives addressing these questions from standpoints such as that of a politician from Poland, Władysław Bartoszewski, or a politician from Germany and Israel, Avi Primor, or of an Israeli intellectual, Fania Oz-Salzberger, and an Israeli historian, Guy Miron. There are also insights into the ethical tradition that originated with Rosenzweig from scholars in the USA and Europe, Dan Breslauer

and Eveline Goodman-Thau. Rosenzweig's own notion of Europe is directly explored by an Italian academic, Francesco P. Ciglia. Completing this issue's set of essays are two texts which compare Rosenzweig to the life of Georg Lukács, co-written by Zoltán Tarr and Judith T. Marcus as well as a critical commentary comparing Rosenzweig's »New thinking« to that of Walter Benjamin's by Ezra Tzfadia. A contribution to the current postmodern discussion about St. Paul as political thinker by Gesine Palmer, a set of unpublished letters and texts published and introduced by Wolfgang D. Herzfeld, and several reviews on recently published works about Rosenzweig help to make this third Yearbook of the International Rosenzweig Society a stimulating and timely contribution to the contemporary debate on the meaning of Europe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Martin Brassler

## Inhaltsangaben / Abstracts

*Władysław Bartoszewski (Warschau)*

### Europe at a Cultural Junction. Some Thoughts on European Heritage and Future

In his paper, Władysław Bartoszewski develops a values-based and spiritual notion of Europe. Describing it as a »zone of civilization« not necessarily identical with the strict geographic contours of continent, he extends the zone of »Europe« to all places where »liberty, human dignity, respect for life, an aversion to all forms of overwhelming power and violence, a solidarity with the persecuted and a sense of care for the weak and defenceless are self understood.« He describes these qualities as essentially rooted in the Jewish-Christian tradition and its universalist aspirations to open-mindedness. While advocating the advancement of these values, he dreams of a Europe where integration and responsibility are able to tame the self-glorifying nationalist tendencies that have caused so much damage throughout European history.

*Avi Primor (Herzlyia)*

### The Relations between Israel and Europe

After first outlining the nature of the tensions existing between Europe and Israel, Primor goes on to envision a future of close cooperation between Europe and Israel. Such cooperation, however, is only possible after a successful peace treaty is achieved. This peace treaty, in his view, has to be mediated by the USA. Yet a future commitment to the development of a flourishing Middle East including

Israel and the Arab Countries is unthinkable without the active cooperation of Europe. For understandable reasons, Europe has been underestimated as a possible partner for Israel. But the changes in the European Union and the close neighbourhood should no longer be ignored. Indeed, despite the more than difficult history of Europe's relationship with the Jewish people, Israel should in fact belong to this new Europe.

*Fania Oz-Salzberger (Haifa / Monash)*

### **On Rosenzweig, Israelis and Europe Today**

Franz Rosenzweig is not a relevant figure for current intellectual discourse in Israel due to his religiosity, his meta-historical view of Jewish existence, and his keen interest in Jewish-Christian relations. Yet despite this inherent strangeness to secular Israeli minds, his thought is capable of kindling interesting dialogues between Jewish Israelis and Europeans today.

*Eveline Goodman-Thau (Jerusalem / Kassel)*

### **Truth, Time and the Other in Europe.**

### **Levinas' Ethical Theory of Knowledge from the Sources of Judaism**

The question of the connection between knowledge and ethics touches on the very core of the Western tradition steeped in Hellenism and Hebraism. Emmanuel Levinas' intention is not to find a synthesis between the two but rather to confront the one with the other. My article closely follows Levinas' reading of Jewish and philosophical sources, showing how the question of revelation in both modes of thought is the watershed for an in-depth understanding of knowledge, from the perspective of the relationship between Truth, Time and the Other. The confrontation between Hellenism and Hebraism as expounded by Levinas has influenced, among others, thinkers like Walter Benjamin and in particular Jacques Derrida and has contributed greatly towards an understanding of

the Jewish contribution to Western thought in terms of the connection between knowledge and ethics. This contribution can be particularly fruitful for the New Europe, struggling to find its identity by returning to its spiritual and cultural roots in search for an ethos which bears witness to the notion of difference – a particular universalism – in the confrontation with Truth, Time and the Other in the light of the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on this continent, where morality and mortality are inscribed.

*S. Daniel Breslauer (University of Kansas)*

### **Franz Rosenzweig and the Development of Postmodern Jewish Ethics**

This essay places postmodern European ethics within the context of the history of European Philosophy from Kant through the Present. It shows how contemporary Jewish thinkers have drawn on the European tradition while creating their own postmodern Jewish moral reflections. These newer efforts embody a rejection of Kantian secularism and the universalizing of ethics but also a continuity with the recognition of the interplay of faith and reason in that ethics. The essay traces the influence of Franz Rosenzweig in both the critical and constructive aspects of postmodern European ethics and the Jewish appropriation of that ethics. It considers how his view of Jewish history and of Jewish ritual shape postmodern Jewish moral thinking even when the postmodern thinkers reject some of his conclusions.

*Zoltan Tarr / Judith Marcus (New York)*

### **Georg Lukács – Philosoph und Jude im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts. Notizen zu einer exemplarischen Biographie**

Historically, the problem of the relation of Jews living among the non-Jewish populace, the so-called »Jewish Question,« has elicited different, indeed widely divergent responses and/or solutions. Looking at the responses at the beginning of 20th century Europe,

East and West, the situation is still the same: Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber, for example, opted for a return to, i. e., a renewal of Judaism, while their contemporary, the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács, after a period of ambivalence and hesitation, embraced Bolshevism in theory and praxis and joined the Communist revolution. In the essay, we present a detailed account of Lukács's answer to the »Jewish Question,« with hitherto little known facts and writings both of Lukács and his peers.

*Ezra Tzfadya (Hanover, New Hampshire)*

**Living the Truth of a Free Europe. Community, Philosophy, and Responsibility in the Writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin**

This article builds upon my honors thesis »The Political Language of Community: Linguistic Theology and Aesthetics in the thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin.« It seeks to discern the European quality of their thinking by focusing on their respective notions of Freedom and Messianism. Distinguishing between Rosenzweig's concept of potential messianism and Benjamin's formulation of messianic possibility, the article claims that Benjamin's thought solves many of the inherent tensions plaguing Rosenzweig's philosophy and frees it from its remaining Hegelian shackles. Benjamin is capable of fully reorienting philosophy to the realm of experience by permeating fallen communal language and profane art with the husk of revelatory truth emerging from the post-lapsarian rupture with Origin.

*Francesco Paolo Ciglia (Chieti-Pescara)*

**Between Homeric and Biblical Worldviews. Rosenzweig's notion of Europe**

In this contribution, Franz Rosenzweig's European thought is examined. The basis for this is the short text, »Globus. Studies to the world-historical space teachings«, written in 1917 while he was in

the Balkans. Its European understanding arose in the context of a ›sketch‹ outline about the whole history of worldhumanism. The latter is thought as the result of two polar and complementary forces. In this connection Europe is thought substantially as the idea and the political-cultural draft of a planetary universalizing process and spreading mental values, which were developed in the ancient mediterranean cultures. Europe is the tension, which makes it possible to develop fruitful relations between different and sometimes also opposite cultures. Europe is the production of a transcultural horizon, in whose context different humans, peoples, languages, and cultures can talk with one another and understand themselves.

*Gesine Palmer (Berlin)*

### Thinking to Stay. Franz Rosenzweig's Anti-Conversion and the New Pauliners

If Paulinian theology is being built on conversion, Rosenzweig's philosophy is being built on something like »anti-conversion«. His move to remain Jewish provides one of the strongest Jewish answers to Paul. Hence it is not by chance that in almost every work on Paul that appears in the context of more or less postmodern philosophy Rosenzweig is at least being hinted at.



## Aufsätze / Essays

## Living the Truth of a Free Europe. Community, Philosophy, and Responsibility in the Writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin

From Mendelsohn to Cohen, the relationship of Judaism towards the idea of Europe has often relied on a predictable compromise in the realm of Jewish-German thought. Judaism, as conceived in philosophical discourse, is normally stripped of whatever radical exteriority and otherness it could possibly possess in order that an inner message of ethical monotheism, consistent with core Enlightenment values, can come to the fore. Such proclamations of ethical monotheism insist that Judaism contributes to the establishment of European civilization and culture due to the fact that this uncovered inner core of the Jewish tradition strengthens Europe's already proclaimed »enlightened« self-image. The more than two thousand-year-old Jewish intellectual tradition is a deep source that can provide a powerful medium in which this »new« European message can gain legitimacy, critical refinement, and popular influence. Under this scenario, the Jewish philosopher becomes an interpreter and exponent of enlightenment values as well as a representative of a self-proclaimed »true« Judaism in the political sense. His critical engagement with the texts of the Jewish and Western tradition helps European society progress by deepening its capacity to understand the enlightened basis, ethical consequence, and future potential of its proclaimed ideal, while Judaism achieves indirect intellectual legitimacy through such mutually beneficial advocacy.

The thought of Franz Rosenzweig put this view of Jewish thought's *raison d'être*, the enlightened core of European civilization, and the role of the Jewish intellectual in question. Positing Judaism as a tradition of radical alterity in opposition to a more dominant and potentially dangerous Christian ethos, Rosenzweig

insisted that »Europe« consists of two separate linguistic communities whose dangerous, but necessary interaction as distinct singular entities produces what we come to know as German and European civilization. His conception of European Enlightenment and its subsequent nationalist reaction revolved around what he saw as the translation of the authoritarian and Christian messianic impulse latent in all idealist thought. Indeed, the thought of Herman Cohen sought to partially address this problem through an attempt to rescue Kantian philosophy from its Hegelian statist re-interpretation. Yet Rosenzweig goes a step further by categorically rejecting the primacy of thought over experience that he believed has tainted the entire Kantian project.

### Correlations und Divergences: What Defines Political Community?

The recent uncovering of correspondence between Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber has revealed that Walter Benjamin was indeed intimately familiar with Rosenzweig's work and indeed credits him for the theoretical inspiration behind his formulation of a non-totalistic theory of Origin. Indeed, at its core, Rosenzweig's criticism of Kantian philosophy revolves around the insistence of such thought to conceive of a »complete Origin from which all variegated reality stems and to which »subsequent« experience is beholden. For both Rosenzweig and Benjamin, Origin is an already compromised entity as it meets human experience in the space provided by language and the encounter with art. Experience is pulled in both the direction of this multifarious Origin and towards an opaque and ultimately unachievable Messianic goal. Yet despite this essential similarity, Benjamin's formulation of the political community emerging from this encounter with Origin is markedly different from that of Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig insists on two separate communal formations possessing radically different conceptions of language and art and engaged in a dangerous, but necessary confrontation; a confrontation aimed at preventing the other from attempting to reach their full messianic potential through the oblit-

eration of difference (Christianity) or the neglect of the worldly (Judaism). Leora Batnitsky notes that

»Judaism and Christianity exist in a dialogic relationship not because they strive for the building of something new together, but rather because their relationship with each-other strengthens the judgement of one over and against the other, for the sake of each's self-judgement.«<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, unlike Rosenzweig, Benjamin refuses to claim that the individual Christian receives a taste of messianic Origin through the experience of sacred art, or that the Jewish community reaches a temporary state of complete aura and transcendence when involved in communal prayer. Instead, Benjamin emphasizes a single theologically anchored community united and divided by a simultaneous collective hermeneutic engagement with profane aesthetics in the medium of fallen linguistic communication. What then accounts for such a profound difference in the construction of political community?

The answer to this question is intimately intertwined with the answer to another question: In what sense then can Rosenzweig and Benjamin's thought be considered European? This is a problematic query, as the critique of both these figures is intensely focused on challenging the current fashionable notion of a Europe that revolves around an attachment to enlightenment values, economic prosperity, technological advancement and a Judeo-Christian ethic. It is quite certain that both Rosenzweig and Benjamin would treat the idealization and, to some extent, idolization, of individual freedom, private property, supranational integration, scientific progress, and successful Enlightenment so dear to today's Europe with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Yet I would like to argue that it is precisely their dedication to, and interpretation of, what true freedom can mean that makes their thought immanently and eminently European. Freedom is not necessarily connected with the right of the individual to accumulate property or express political opinions. Freedom indicates the attempt of a community of singular individuals to communicate with

---

<sup>1</sup> Batnitsky, Leora. *Idolatry and Representation*, 159.

one another while motivated by an imperative of revelatory truth. Both Benjamin and Rosenzweig are committed to an exposition of this revelatory truth's communal, experiential content. Such content is created by a community responding to a contentless imperative crying out from its collective history as signified by the historically anchored category of Revelation. This cry is able to lay claim on singular individuals through the portal provided by fallen language and profane art. For Rosenzweig and Benjamin, no truth (including the tempting notion of continual progress) is »self evident.« Quite the contrary is the case. Truth is only evident as individuals repeatedly come together in a community with the attempt to create it.

### Origin and Revelation: Uncovering the Locus of Freedom within Communal Experience

Once again, the theoretical rationale for such a claim lies in their mutual conception of variegated Origin and the primacy of social experience in relation to the abstract thought of the contemplating philosopher. Yet while Rosenzweig's thought allows the philosopher to conceive of a permanent return to a unified, complete Origin once messianic potential has realized itself, Benjamin completely rules out such a possibility, even in the realm of pure philosophic epistemology. In Benjamin's oeuvre, Jews, Christians, Muslims and everyone in between are responsive to the imperative of revelatory truth arising from art and language. It is irrelevant to him whether such an aesthetic or language is secular or profane. For him, access to a sphere of Origin, where the aura of art and language had once been complete, has been permanently blocked. Benjamin defines aura as »the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.«<sup>2</sup> Recognition of this historic blockage in transmissibility from the sphere of Origin into experience is achieved through the necessity of living individuals to communi-

---

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 221.

cate with one another within a fallen and decayed state of language and artistic production. All that remains in this post-lapsarian state is the presence of unrealizable messianic possibility instead of the hovering temptation of messianic potentiality leading to the necessity of social life. Indeed, Benjamin's Europe is devoid of explicit communal boundaries and makes all singular social actors participants in a collective hermeneutic.

For Rosenzweig, the self-negation of God's unitary essence during his departure from the sphere of complete Origin is not a historical event comparable to Revelation. It is a process that continually recurs so that a communally diverse social order may experientially function and be infused with messianic potential. A permanent state of Messiah remains just beyond the reach of the experientially based Jew and Christian, each anchored in their respective linguistic and aesthetic structures. Indeed, Rosenzweig admits in the last chapter of *The Star of Redemption* that social life would be impossible once certain communal messianic potential has been permanently (instead of temporarily) realized and the unity of Origin is restored. Life on Earth is impossible when such Messiah is realized, hence it cannot be possible to establish Messiah as the goal toward which the community strives. Only the philosopher, however, is capable of basking in the thought of such an aura-infused utopia prior to God's self-negation.

Unlike Benjamin, Rosenzweig believes that the process needed to create truth's experiential content is not explicit to those actually directly participating in communal action. From his privileged standpoint in the sphere of reflection, the philosopher can contemplate a state outside of the life cycle where the solitary reflecting individual can bask in blissful communication with God. Rosenzweig makes it clear that the individual Jew never comes into conversation with the true self of God alone. Yet it is telling that he ends his *Star of Redemption* with a romantic description of the aura-infused comfort of such a singular interaction that ultimately must emerge »ins Leben,« as if waking up from a sweet innocent dream into the necessary reality of worldly existence.

»Es wagt jeden Augenblick zur Wahrheit Wahrlich zu sagen. Einfältig wandeln mit deinem Gott – die Worte stehen über dem Tor, dem Tor, das aus dem geheimnisvoll-wunderbaren Leuchten des göttlichen Heiligums, darin kein Mensch leben bleiben kann, herausführt. Wohinaus aber öffnen sich die Flügel des Tors? Du weisst es nicht? INS LEBEN.«<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, if the philosopher were to be fully part of experiential reality in every living moment, even in a state of solitary reflection, such a description would need to begin with the expression »aus dem Leben« instead of ending with a proclamation of a necessary entrance into life. Furthermore, if such a contemplative reflection were to be fully grounded in and based upon experience, the expression »leben bleiben« would need to be shortened to simply »leben.«

## Potential and Possible Messianism

In fact, to speak of a »potential« Messianic state as Rosenzweig does is to assert that under specific circumstances, however rare and improbable they may be, a certain reality latent within the present state signifying a certain »true« or »ideal« character can emerge. Judaism and Christianity live with the potential of coming into permanent communication with the unnegated divine. Potential implies that such a future state of affairs is, to those immersed in experiential reality, achievable, preferable and more »advanced« than the current one. Indeed, the return to the unified state of Origin free from the unbearable diversity and continuous *Entzweiung* of daily life is Hegelian to the core, and it is in this instance that Rosenzweig reveals his continued servitude to the Hegelian tradition despite his serious attempt to break free of its shackles. His *Star of Redemption* and its emphasis on the singular individual engaged in communal life signifies a nearly successful attempt to come out

---

<sup>3</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz. *Der Stern der Erlösung* 472, english translation of W. Hallo: »In every moment truth must be true to itself. The simple pleasure of communion with your God. The words stand above the gate, that gate, out of which the awesomely secret illumination of godly divinity radiates, a divinity within which no man remain living. In which direction do the doors of this gate open? You don't know the answer. Into life.

of the grave dug by Hegel. Yet this goal falls just sort of successful fruition.

Messiah is considered a possibility for Benjamin instead of a potentiality because the word possibility implies the real presence (and perhaps even haunting) of a certain rationally achievable desire that nevertheless refuses to rule out the potential impossibility of its achievement. For Benjamin, our medium of linguistic communication contains the residue of unvariegated Origin and compels our continued hermeneutic encounter with Messianic possibility. His messianism can best be described in the following terms:

»if one arrow points toward the goal toward which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the question of messianic intensity, then certainly the quest for a free humanity for happiness runs counter to the messianic direction; but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic kingdom.«<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the messianic force that shoots humanity back towards the past is destined to remain in the realm of the purely impulsive command. The perpetual potentiality of Messiah's arrival in the present, an anticipatory notion of Messiah so central to Rosenzweig's thought, is rendered by Benjamin into a Messiah that could have possibly come, but simply didn't. Instead of waiting for the age of permanent messianic aura and truth to arrive and actually intervene into experience, Benjamin stresses the necessary striving of the temporal community towards the messianic image of the return to complete unvariegated pre-lapsarian Origin, even if such striving may be in vain. This is why the actual ›messianic‹ force may be called a counter-vector. Indeed, the Messianic Kingdom remains outside of profane experience and rooted in the linguistically plentiful realm of Origin. The »coming« of Messiah is a continuously blocked »coming« that only allows shards of messianic fullness to wrap the aesthetic objects of representational analysis. The Messianic Kingdom arrives when communal interaction achieves its utmost freedom and happiness in the hermeneutic performance of

---

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Theological Political Fragment*, 312

daily life through incomplete and decayed linguistic communication.

It is strange to observe that Benjamin denotes the concept of happiness as being essential to that of a free humanity. One may proceed to ask the obvious question as to how happiness is in any way related to his melancholic view of history that observes only missed opportunities crying out for redemption, its voice oriented towards a present that cannot even communicate properly. Might a notion of happiness suggest a fullness or junction between individuals anathema to the disjunction of uncommunicative linguistic reality that he so prizes? Werner Hamacher maintains that the Benjaminian conception of communal »happiness« is bound precisely by this notion of historical time existing as the revelation of pure possibility, of the possible existing »as the surplus over the factual.«<sup>5</sup> As mentioned previously, Benjamin's theological notion of Revelation centers upon the functioning of Revelation as a miraculous event rooted within the meta-language of religious speech. Revelation, as »the highest mental region religion ... [that] at the same time does not know the unexpressible« acts as the reminder of the purely possible by expressing itself »through the name.« Man is subsequently relegated to the »more or less material community.«<sup>6</sup> Similar to Rosenzweig's attempt to establish a link between revelation's dialogic impulse and the formation of community, Benjamin's revelation pushes the »creaturely« singular man onto the aesthetic shards of history and thereby into the cohortive world of the communal We. Revelation induces man to solve the problem of his own linguistic insufficiency with a dialogic Other, even if that insufficiency can not actually be completely cured.<sup>7</sup> Once again, Benjamin insists that such a process is conducted through Revelation's reminder of the possibility, but not the anticipatory potentiality, of experienced linguistic plenitude.

---

<sup>5</sup> Hamacher, Werner. *Now: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time in Walter Benjamin and History*, 43

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, W. *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, 321

<sup>7</sup> Blanchot, Maurice. *The Unavowable Community*, 19

## Digging Out of Hegel's Grave: The Reorientation of Philosophy to Experience

Marx is another figure caught in Hegel's clutches despite his attempts to orient the analytical impulse of philosophy to the toils of lived human experience. As Hannah Arendt notes masterfully in her work *The Human Condition*, Marx's entire philosophy revolves around the idolization of the laborious toil of man immersed in daily experience. Yet for Marx, the Messiah achieved by the communist revolt of the proletariat paradoxically leads to the abolition of painful labor as the central kernel of life.

»While it was an eternal necessity imposed by nature and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the realm of freedom supplant the realm of necessity.«<sup>8</sup>

While the philosophies of Marx and Rosenzweig could not be more different, it is telling that they end their philosophical projects with the glorification of the life of pure contemplation without laborious toil in the realm of experience. While Rosenzweig puts an end to the permanency of such contemplative stillness by imploring the philosopher and God to emerge »ins Leben,« it is impossible to ignore or underestimate the sense of emotional and intellectual attachment to such a solitary state of contemplative being. The fact that such a state of being can be imagined as even existing outside of the realm of experience is anathema to Benjamin.

Thus, while Rosenzweig alerts us to the necessary danger of potential messianism inherent in Christianity and Judaism's complex symbiotic relationship, it is Benjamin that takes the final step in the necessary attempt to ground reflective philosophy in the experience of all men, instead of secretly idealizing the lonely philosopher. One could go so far as to say that while Rosenzweig's proposed system is analytically descriptive of certain deadly symptoms and their roles in creating the messianic idol of nationalist violence, the critical

---

<sup>8</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* 106

hermeneutic thrust spanning the breadth of Benjamin's creative output provides a prescription. This prescription, however, is not necessarily filled by the subsequent implementation of any concrete political recommendation. It does not have to take the form of an actual general strike (*Critique of Violence*), the elimination of commodity relationships represented by historical materialism, (*Theses on History*) or the complete deconstruction of Kantian idealism's idolatrous supremacy (*The Coming Program of Philosophy*).

Benjamin's prescription becomes affective, however, due to the critical space produced by the historically based images he invokes and creates through his own act of representation and conceptual analysis. Such constellational images are produced for the benefit of future collective hermeneutic interpretation and possible redemption. The ordering of messianic time lies, therefore, not only in the concrete actions of the political realm, but with the artist and his critic. Only with the active cooperation of all three is it possible to ensure the proper interaction of past, present, and future as distinctive, transformed, and transformational categories grounded in a hermeneutically charged communal sphere.

Benjamin's elimination of the communal distinction between Judaism and Christianity, along with his insertion of transcendent immanence upon all finite aesthetic objects in the present, should not suggest a capitulation to the real totalizing risk of Christian idolatry suggested by Rosenzweig. Benjamin is not attempting to make a temporary encounter with the perfection of Origin permanent, as the Christian risks doing when he encounters his sacred art. He does not risk subsuming human distinctness into a universal totality represented by the messianic image. Rather, by suggesting the redemptive character of even profane art due to the impulse shot forth from linguistic lack, Benjamin allows a husk of truth to enter the social realm from the inaccessible Origin in the form of a messianic command lacking punishable content. He does not attribute any aesthetic, whether it is that of Origin or the state, the power to subsume a community while simultaneously remaining sovereign outside its borders. Instead, it is the community that produces truth out of the revelatory command, a community generated by the disjointed temporal dialogue with profane art.

## Concluding Remarks

With this in mind, it is possible to gain some speculative insight pertaining to the divergence between Rosenzweig and Benjamin's biographies. According to Rosenzweig, Jewish community and its trans-national/historical relationship to language and text needed to be strengthened in order for Christianity to successfully resist totalizing behavior. In light of this realization, Rosenzweig proceeded to found »Das Juedische Lehrhaus« in Berlin, an institute committed to adult education in Hebrew language and the texts of the Jewish tradition. In contrast, Benjamin rejected an offer to join Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem and participate in the academic revival of Judaism and the Hebrew language. He remained committed to analyzing the cultural artifacts of the European tradition. Benjamin's major political act spanned the course of a lifetime, an ethical act of continuous writing, reading, and analyzing. Indeed, these are the only acts that could allow him to find, produce, and enable a free community in a Europe he held so dear.

## Complete Bibliography

- Alter, Robert. *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Scholem, and Benjamin*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998
- Batnitsky, Leora. *Idolatry and Representation*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.
- Benedikt, Michael. *Das Ende der idealistischen Philosophie und der Uebergang von der Dialogphilosophie zur Gesellschaftsethik. Dargestellt an Ferdinand Ebner, Franz Rosenzweig, und Franz Fischer*. Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig, 1886–1929: internationaler Kongress, Kassel 1986
- Benjamin, Walter. *Zum Programm der Kommenden Philosophie*. in *Angelus Novus*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1966.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. in *Illuminations*. ed. Arendt, H. Knopf, New York, 1985.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Task of the Translator* in *Illuminations*. ed. Arendt, H. Knopf, New York, 1985.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Theses on History*. in *Illuminations*. ed. Arendt, H. Knopf, New York, 1985.

- Benjamin, Walter. *Theologico-Political Fragment* in *Reflections*. ed. Demetz, P. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York, 1978.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Fate and Character* in *Reflections*. ed. Demetz, P. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York, 1978.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Critique of Violence* in *Reflections*. ed. Demetz, P. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York, 1978.
- Benjamin, Walter. *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man* in *Reflections*. ed. Demetz, P. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York, 1978.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. Osbourne, J. Verso, New York. 2003
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Unavowable Community*. Trans. Jorris, P. Station Hill Press, Barrytown, 1988.
- Butler, Judith. *Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin's Critique of Violence*. in *Political Theologies*. ed. De Vries, H. and Sullivan, L. Fordham University Press, New York, 2006.
- Caygill, Howard. *Non-Messianic Theology in Benjamin's On the Concept of History*. in *Walter Benjamin and History*. ed. Benjamin, Andrew. Continuum, New York, 2005.
- De Wilde, Marc. *Violence in the State of Exception. Reflections on Theologico-Political Motifs in Benjamin and Schmitt*. in *Political Theologies*. ed. De Vries, H. and Sullivan, L. Fordham University Press, New York, 2006.
- Gibbs, Robert. *Messianic Epistemology: Thesis XV*. in *Walter Benjamin and History*. ed. Benjamin, Andrew. Continuum, New York, 2005.
- Hamacher, Werner. »Now« *Walter Benjamin on Historical Time. Walter Benjamin and History*. ed. Benjamin, Andrew. Continuum, New York, 2005.
- Köpenick, Lutz. *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1999.
- Mosès, Stephane. *Der Engel der Geschichte: Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, und Gerschom Scholem*. Jüdischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1994.
- Mosès, Stephane. *From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War in Political Theologies*. ed. De Vries, H. and Sullivan, L. Fordham University Press, New York, 2006.
- Mosès, Stephane. *Spüren der Schrift: Von Goethe bis Celan*. Jüdischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1987.
- Mosès, Stephane. *System and Revelation*. Trans. Tihanyi, C. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1992.
- Mosès, Stephane. *Walter Benjamin's Metaphors of Origin in Jewish Writers, German Literature*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1996.
- Pizer, John. *Toward a Theory of Radical Origin: Essays on Modern German Thought*. University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Rochlitz, Rainer. *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. Guilford Press, New York, 1996.
- Rosenzweig, Franz. *The New Thinking*. Trans. Galli, B. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1999.

- Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. Trans. Halo, W. Holt, Reinhart and Wilson, New York, 1985.
- Rubenstein, Ernest. *An Episode of Jewish Romanticism*. SUNY Press, Albany, 1999.
- Santner, Eric. *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2006
- Santner, Eric. *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001.
- Schäffler, Richard. *Offenbarung im Denken Franz Rosenzweigs*. Ludgeras Verlag, Essen, 1979.
- Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994.