

Franz Rosenzweig's and Emmanuel Levinas's Critique of German Idealism's Pseudotheology

Michael Mack / Hebrew University, Jerusalem

I

Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* opens with an outspoken critique of German idealism's rejection of the body's (i.e., the individual person's) independence from the body politic. Even though he first referred to philosophy in general and has often been said not to distinguish between ancient Greek and modern German thought, in the course of the introduction to *The Star* he did, indeed, mark Hegel and Kant as a break within Western metaphysics. On the battlefields of World War I, Rosenzweig emphasized that, rather than trying to "escape any kind of fetters" (*irgendwelchen Fesseln entfliehen*)—as philosophy sets out to convince us—"man . . . wants to remain, he wants to—live."¹ To be sure, he did not see any causal connection that would tie a philosophical dualism between immanence and transcendence—or, between belief and knowledge—to the carnage perpetrated in World War I. On the contrary, blood had been shed in order to increase a nation's economic and political influence. However, Rosenzweig saw, behind this nationalist aggrandizement, a pseudotheological conflation of the immanent with the transcendent. Instead of being aware of the gulf that lies between these two entities, nationalist politicians set out to deify the immanent notions of nation and *Volk*.

Nationalism and German idealism both set out to realize the promises that traditional metaphysics and theology had circumscribed to the realm of belief. According to Rosenzweig, Western philosophy that precedes German idealism allowed for another component, which cannot be re-

¹ English translation from Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by William W. Hallo (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1985), p. 3 (original German from *Der Stern der Erlösung*, [Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990], p. 3).

© 2003 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

0022-4189/2003/8301-0003/\$10.00

duced to that which is perceived to be the societal norm since it is itself “other.” It is the unknown. It is belief. What distinguishes German idealism, as Rosenzweig understood it, from past philosophy is the bold move with which knowledge usurps the place of infinity. Within German idealism, the transcendent—instead of constituting a question of belief—is fully known, since it has formed a total unity with the immanent. It is this conflation of what has in past ages been a matter of belief with a total and absolute epistemology that provoked Rosenzweig to dedicate the first part of *The Star* to an insistence on separation between the epistemological (factuality or knowledge) and the speculative (belief). German transcendental philosophy had silenced the voice of the unknowable other by both turning matters of belief into matters of fact and by (at the same time) undermining the concept of revelation: “One silenced the voice which claimed possession, in a revelation, of the source of divine knowledge originating beyond reason. Centuries of philosophical labors were devoted to this disputation between knowledge and belief; they reach their goal at the precise moment when the knowledge of the All reaches a conclusion in itself.”² Rosenzweig perceives in Hegel’s thought such “innermost interconnection” (*innerlichster Zusammenhang*) between knowledge and belief in which philosophy fulfills “what was promised in revelation” (*Erfüllerin des in der Philosophie Verheißenen*).³ A few pages following this discussion of an all-encompassing knowledge that implements the promises of religious beliefs immanently in the sphere of world history, Rosenzweig interprets Kantian moral philosophy in the context of what Levinas would analyze as totality: “And even in Kant’s case the concept of the All again carried off the victory over the individual through his formulation of the law of morality as the universally valid fact.”⁴ In the German original Rosenzweig does not write “even,” but “especially” (*gerade bei Kant*), thus emphasizing the importance of Kant’s reformulation of metaphysics and moral philosophy. He in fact traces Hegel’s all-encompassing notion of knowledge back to Kantian moral and political thought. Thus, “Kant himself serves as godfather to Hegel’s concept of

² Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 6. “Zum Schweigen gebracht wurde die Stimme, welche in einer Offenbarung die jenseits des Denkens entspringende Quelle göttlichen Wissens zu besitzen behauptete. Die philosophische Arbeit von Jahrhunderten ist dieser Auseinandersetzung des Wissens mit dem Glauben gewidmet; sie kommt zum Ziel in dem gleichen Augenblick, wo das Wissen vom All in sich selber zum Abschluß kommt” (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 6).

³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, pp. 6, 7 (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 7).

⁴ This serious mistranslation of this German adverb *gerade* has led to some misunderstandings of Rosenzweig’s relationship to Kant. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 10. “Und gerade bei Kant hat durch die Formulierung des Sittengesetzes als der allgemeingültigen Tat wieder der Begriff des All über das Eins des Menschen den Sieg davongetragen” (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 11).

The Journal of Religion

universal history, not only with his political philosophy and his philosophy of history [*staats-und geschichtsphilosophischen Ansätzen*], but already with his ethical fundamentals [*ethischen Grundbegriffen*].⁵ The Kantian attempt to overcome a dependence on the external world (heteronomy), that is to say, his formulation of autonomy as the freedom from empirical and therefore contingent determinations prepares the ground for positing the transcendent in the immanent.

Indeed, Rosenzweig develops his notion of metaethics as an inversion of Kant's all-encompassing categorical imperative, with a view to allowing contingency, as an independent entity, into the sphere of ethics. As I have examined elsewhere, the categorical imperative works without any considerations for the specific context in which a moral actor finds himself or herself.⁶ Thus, the law has to be followed for law's sake, as commanded by a rationality that has freed itself from the imperfection of immanence (i.e., contingency, arbitrariness, etc.). Inverting the autonomy of the categorical imperative, metaethics places law at the service of empirical and contingent humanity so that "the law [*das Gesetz*] is given to man, not man to the law."⁷ Metaethics thus "refers to the independence of (created) man,"⁸ but this independence does not bespeak human autonomy in the Kantian sense from which it differentiates itself. Rosenzweig says that the law is given to the human, instead of the human giving himself or herself to the law (as is the case with the categorical imperative). In this way, Rosenzweig's "meta" denotes the independence of the body (the empirical) from the body politic (freedom from the empirical by means of ethics and politics).

This critique of an idealist translation of the body into the body politic comes clearly to the fore when Rosenzweig takes issue with the Kantian notion of autonomy. Autonomous law demands that the individual abandon any meaningful relation to the external world. It points to an entity without specific content. Indeed, "the requirement of autonomy requires man to will only in general, only altogether."⁹ According to Rosenzweig, it is however, "impossible to will 'something' and nevertheless only to will

⁵ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 10. "Kant selbst steht bei Hegel's Weltgeschichte Pate, nicht bloß in seinen staats- und geschichtsphilosophischen Ansätzen, sondern schon in den ethischen Grundbegriffen" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 11).

⁶ Compare Michael Mack's "Between Kant and Kafka: Benjamin's Notion of Law," *Neophilologus* 85 (2001):257-72.

⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 14. "Das Gesetz ist dem Menschen, nicht der Mensch dem Gesetz gegeben" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 15).

⁸ Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 96.

⁹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 214. "Und die Forderung der Autonomie fordert, daß der Mensch nur schlechthin, nur überhaupt will" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 239).

'in general.'"¹⁰ Kantian autonomy therefore does not appeal to context-specific ways of acting. Instead, it demands the universal application of a supposedly universally valid categorical imperative. As the very term "imperative" indicates, it works via compulsion.

Rosenzweig turns the tables on Kant by arguing that the categorical imperative institutes a modern Western version of Islam. He defines the Islamic with the same terms with which Kant described Jewishness. In an important essay, Paul Mendes-Flohr has analyzed "Rosenzweig's patent transfer of the charge of heteronomy to Islam."¹¹ It has, however, not been noticed that this projection of heteronomy onto Islam constitutes a first step toward a critique of Kant's notion of autonomy. Rosenzweig in fact develops a counternarrative, in which he deconstructs the conceptual opposition between the heteronomous and the autonomous. He does so by associating Kantian autonomy with the very heteronomy that he has projected on to the Islamic: "Thus the world act in Islam means the practice of obedience. . . . This straightforward, obedient piety is based on a free self-denial ever laboriously regained. And it finds an exact counterpart, strangely enough, in the secular piety of more recent times which freely conforms to universal law. The ethics of Kant and his followers, for instance, as well as the general consciousness, sought to evolve such a piety."¹² That which Kant characterized as freedom, namely, the "free self-denial ever laboriously regained" (*freien, mühsam immer neu gewonnenen Selbstverleugnung*), Rosenzweig theorizes as the enslaving principle of Kantian autonomy. Here Rosenzweig analyzes the pseudothological structure behind Kant's moral philosophy. He in fact argues that such ethics instantiates "the secular piety [*Weltfrömmigkeit*] of more recent times," in which the worldly is seen to be able to abolish its contingency through strict obedience to all-embracing and therefore noncontingent general laws.

To this extent, an ethical (Kant's moral philosophy) or political (Hegel's philosophy of history) attempt to turn the contingent into the material

¹⁰ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 214. "Man kann nicht 'etwas' wollen und trotzdem nur 'überhaupt' wollen" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 239).

¹¹ Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Rosenzweig and Kant: Two Views of Ritual and Religion," in his *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 283–310, 295.

¹² Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (n. 1 above), p. 217. "Indem aber die Welttat im Islam Ausübung des Gerhorsams ist, wird nun sein Menschenbegriff ganz deutlich. . . . Und wieder findet diese auf dem Grunde einer freien, mühsam immer neu gewonnenen Selbstverleugnung schlicht gehorsame Frömmigkeit merkwürdigerweise ihre genaue Entspréhung in in der Weltfrömmigkeit des freien sich Einfügens in das allgemeine Gesetz, wie sie die neuere Zeit etwa in der Ethik Kants und seiner Nachfolger sowie überhaupt im allgemeinen Bewußtsein" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, [n. 1 above], pp. 242–43).

The Journal of Religion

for its own overcoming, in a world that has lost its worldliness, does not constitute the end of theology. Rosenzweig makes this point clear in his discussion of idealist production, which (as we will see) he differentiates from God's creation. He speaks of the "monumental error of idealism," which "consisted in thinking that the All was really wholly contained in its 'generation' [*Erzeugung*] of the All."¹³ Kant's freedom consists in this construction of an immanent world, which the autonomous human mind builds along the lines of a theological conception of the "other-worldly"—purged of any bodily and therefore contingent imperfection.

Yet, idealist production requires the empirical as material with which to construct an other-worldly, that is to say, a noncontingent heaven on earth. In this context, Rosenzweig employs Marxist analysis of capitalist economics in order to describe the mystification at the heart of idealism's rationality. Idealism obfuscates the means of its production, that is to say, it hides the chaos of the particular that preconditions its idealist constructions: "But idealism does not cherish this allusion to an underlying chaos of the distinctive [*dunkles Chaos des Besonderen*], and it quickly seeks to get away from it."¹⁴ Rosenzweig refers to the material foundation of the divine, as delineated in Schelling's *Ages of the World*.¹⁵ Schelling's idealism differs from that of German transcendental philosophy in that he argues for the chaos and materiality that not only constitutes God's creation but also God's very character. Rosenzweig also associates the particular (*Besondere*), which resists an idealist translation of the body into the body politic, with Judaism. This gets lost in the English translation in which we read of "an underlying chaos of the distinctive." By contrast, Rosenzweig writes of the dark chaos of the particular. In doing so, he recalls "the dark drive," which he characterizes as "'my Judaism'"¹⁶ and of which he became aware in the crisis year of 1920, when, with reference to this "darkness," he rejected the position of a university lecturer (as offered to him by his academic mentor, Friederich Meinecke).

Whereas Rosenzweig's Jewish thought stays cognizant of its particular-

¹³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 188 "Es war der ungeheure Irrtum des Idealismus, daß er meinte, in seiner 'Erzeugung' des All sei wirklich des All sei wirklich das All ganz erhalten" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 209).

¹⁴ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 141. "Aber der Idealismus liebt diesen Hinweis [daß A = B eingeschlossen wäre zwischen ein zeugendes A = A und ein gebärendes B = B] auf ein ihm zugrunde liegendes dunkles Chaos des Besonderen nicht und sucht schnell davon wegzukommen" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 157).

¹⁵ For a discussion of Rosenzweig's reading of Schelling, see Else Rahel-Freund's *Franz Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Existence: An Analysis of "The Star of Redemption,"* trans. Stephen L. Weinstein and Robert Israel, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Dodrecht: Kluwer, 1979); and Ernest Rubinstein's *An Episode of Jewish Romanticism: Franz Rosenzweig's "The Star of Redemption"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

¹⁶ *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, presented by Nahum N. Glatzer, foreword by Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Cambridge, Ind.: Hackett, 1998), p. 96.

ity, German idealism belies its own particular and material foundations, while attempting to erase what Schelling charmingly calls “the modesty of matter”¹⁷ by the production of a world that is universal due to its indifference to worldly, that is to say, material and particular determinations. Rosenzweig points out that such production nevertheless works with matter. Matter provides nourishment for the apparatus of other-worldly production, thus feeding reason’s autonomous machinery with energy. Rosenzweig interprets this immanent production of transcendence not in terms of a movement away from the theological; instead, he defines it as an anticreaturely theology, as a rational theology that wants to do away with its contingent, bodily foundation: “For us, Idealism had proven to be in competition, not with theology in general, but only with the theology of creation. For creation we had sought the way to revelation.”¹⁸ Note that the German original reads “from (*von*) creation we had sought the way to revelation.” Thus, the separation between world and God does not result in a radical divide between immanence and transcendence. Such a radical divide would indeed require the overcoming of the immanent by immanent means (reason’s autonomy that frees the human from any dependence on matter) or, otherwise, a miraculous destruction of immanence by transcendence. Rosenzweig, however, affirms the independence of God, world, and man, only to prepare the ground for their correlation in which, thanks to the distance between these three entities, love of one for the other becomes possible. Thus, he combines what vibrates in Hermann Cohen’s thought as an unbridgeable tension. The sensuousness of the worldly indeed constitutes a radical contrast to the purity of the divine, but this separation, between creation and the creator, does not mean that the worldly can only be redeemed through its self-production as the other-worldly. Cohen clings to a Kantian notion of reason, as the freedom from contingency, and he argues that this contingent world is intrinsically good and does not need to be overcome. The temporal world is good because, it is at the same time, eternal, that is to say, created by God. Developing and deepening Cohen’s Mendelssohnian reading of Kant, Rosenzweig correlates that which remains separated and thus affirms an equality of infinity between God, man, and world.

Strikingly, German idealism’s production of the worldly as other-worldly results in depriving matter of its otherness. That is to say, it takes

¹⁷ F. W. J. von Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom: Ages of the World: An Essay by Slavoj Žižek and the Complete Text of Schelling’s “Die Weltalter” (Second Draft, 1813)*, trans. by Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 150.

¹⁸ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 188. “Der Idealismus hatte sich uns erwiesen als eine Konkurrenz nicht mit der Theologie überhaupt, sondern nur mit der Theologie der Schöpfung. Von der Schöpfung hatten wir den Weg zur Offenbarung gesucht.” (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 209).

The Journal of Religion

away the transcendence that dwells in the immanent and that comes to the fore in moments of revelation, which occur when one individual helps to preserve the life of another. Thus, creation reveals redemption: "Both revelation and redemption are creation in a certain manner that cannot be analyzed as yet."¹⁹ In the course of *The Star* Rosenzweig indeed "links creation and redemption through revelation, the latter understood as *love*."²⁰ Love, however, originates in an awareness of the distinctive irreducible otherness of an individual, despite the general attributes of contingency and mortality.

By equating the general with the particular (Rosenzweig's formula, $A = B$), idealism reduces the individual body to the generality of death, from which he or she can only escape by willingly forsaking his or her empirical existence for the sake of a greater entity (Kant's ethical commonwealth or Hegel's spirit). This is what Rosenzweig means when he writes that Hegel's philosophy "had locked . . . every Beyond from its view."²¹ He clarifies this point by arguing that the worldly has become the other of reason's autonomy: "Thus the world is a beyond as against what is intrinsically logical, as against unity."²² According to Hegelian logic, reason realized the illusion of immediate being by speculatively positing the endpoint of existence—namely, death—within the presence of empirical life. Rosenzweig has this dialectical reduction of being to nothingness in mind when he writes that the worldly has become the transcendent.

II

To this extent, philosophy "has to rid the world of what is singular, and this un-doing of the Aught is also the reason why it has to be idealistic."²³ What Rosenzweig criticizes here in German idealism, Emmanuel Levinas depicts as violence, qua totality, and he contrasts it with an ethics, qua infinity. Levinas in fact opposes the idealist (and Heideggerian) notion of freedom to that of justice: "If freedom denotes the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other, knowledge, where an existent is given by interposition of impersonal Being, contains the ultimate sense of free-

¹⁹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 103. "Auch Offenbarung, auch Erlösung sind eben in gewisser, noch nicht auseinanderzusetzender Weise Schöpfung" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 114).

²⁰ Cohen (n. 8 above), p. 95.

²¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 7. "Den Blick . . . in jedes Jenseits verschlossen" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 8).

²² Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 14. "So ist die Welt dem eigentlich Logischen, der Einheit, gegenüber ein Jenseits" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 15).

²³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 4. "Daß die Philosophie das Einzelne aus der Welt schaffen muß, diese Abschaffung des Etwas ist auch der Grund, weshalb sie idealistisch sein muß" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 4).

dom. It would be opposed to justice.”²⁴ *Totality and Infinity* in fact radicalizes the philosophical, qua ethical, critique of German idealism as first and most clearly spelled out in *The Star of Redemption*, a work to which Levinas refers only once to emphasize that it “is too often present in this book to be cited.”²⁵ Radicalizing Rosenzweig, Levinas redefines philosophical terms, such as metaphysics and freedom against Kant’s notion of autonomy.²⁶ He represents freedom, qua heteronomy; as openness to an infinite variety of particulars: “The presence of the Other, a privileged heteronomy, does not clash with freedom but invests it.”²⁷ Kant had precisely argued that freedom and heteronomy contradict each other. He maintained that a free subject establishes his independence from both nature and religious traditions by following the autonomous laws of self-sufficient reason.²⁸

Before returning to Rosenzweig’s “new thinking,” I will further examine Levinas’s implicit continuation of a Rosenzweigian critique concerning German idealism’s totalitarian agenda. This examination will help to clarify what appears to be *The Star’s* affirmation of the radical distinction between the this-worldly and the other-worldly that goes paradoxically hand in hand with a theology of the mundane. In the important, but often neglected, essay “Signature,” Levinas in fact spells out the relevance of a Kantian autonomy-heteronomy opposition for his analysis of both violence and totality.²⁹ To this extent, he defines “moral consciousness” as “an access to external being,” maintaining that “external being is, *par excellence*, the Other.”³⁰ Against a Kantian philosophy that “reduces the Other [*l’Autre*] to the same and the multiple to the totality, making of autonomy its supreme principle,” Levinas, implicitly expounding Rosenzweig’s “new thinking,” proposes that “philosophy as love of truth aspires to the Other [*l’Autre*]” and thereby “is heteronomy itself,” which, in turn, “is metaphysical.”³¹

Rather than being opposed to the external, empirical world, the meta-

²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁶ “Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of the an I” (*ibid.*, p. 46).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁸ Compare Michael Mack’s “Law, Charity and Taboo or Kant’s Reversal of St. Paul’s Spirit-Letter Opposition and Its Theological Implications,” *Modern Theology* 16 (October 2000): 417–41.

²⁹ For a discussion of how in the thought of Levinas “autonomy is itself a mark of irresponsibility, of moral failing,” see Robert Gibbs’s *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 222.

³⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. by Seàn Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 293.

³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 88.

physical resides in the ethical care for, and not the epistemological penetration through to the essence of, bodily existence. Levinas's critique of the German idealist notion of autonomy thus helps to clarify the apparently self-exclusive tension between immanent and transcendent tendencies in Rosenzweig's new thinking. According to Levinas, a metaphysics that correlates transcendence (or, for that matter, freedom) and heteronomy perceives of mundane, material life in terms of an opening toward the spiritual. The other, or, in other words, the blood and flesh neighbor with whom we interact in everyday life, embodies revelation as long as we do not reduce him or her to the sameness of an abstract law in which he or she would function as a nonparticular, general entity: "The absolute other, whose alterity is overcome in the philosophy of immanence on the allegedly common plane of history, maintains his transcendence in the midst of history."³² What Levinas describes as a "philosophy of immanence" seems to delineate his, and Rosenzweig's, understanding of German idealism.

As we have seen, in the opening pages of *The Star* Rosenzweig represents idealism's distinctive identity via an examination of its attempt to erase from the face of the earth the particular or the other. In his view, this constitutes a theoretical wish for the reconfiguration of the empirical as pure spirit. Rosenzweig takes issue with the ethical consequences of such philosophical displacement, for, on a sociopolitical plane, the theoretical manifestation of immanence that has fully turned into transcendence results in the expulsion of those who are perceived to remain immutably bound to the limitation of what Hegel calls immediate being. From a theological perspective, these philosophical abolitions of distance anticipate redemption, for they turn the world into the other-worldly with the outcome being that the immanent has now—at least within the parameters of idealist discourse—fully become the transcendent by its own—namely, rational—means. When Rosenzweig and Levinas characterize history as idealism's collaborator, they clearly refer to Hegel's dialectics. The latter theorized war—in which the members of a specific community become acquainted with their "master," namely, death—as realization of the idealist insight into the "nothingness" of empirical life.³³

Counterposing such totalitarian reduction of the individual, the particular, in short, the other to the sameness of mortality, Levinas develops his philosophy of the face by a means in which he illustrates the Mosaic commandment "Thou shall not kill." Thus the human face embodies two aspects of heteronomy: that of the neighbor as I interact with him or her

³² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³³ Compare Michael Mack's "The Metaphysics of Eating: Jewish Dietary Law and Hegel's Social Theory," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27 (2001): 59–88.

in the external world and that of the divine whose correlated image I perceive in the face through which, as through a burning bush, God's commandments speak to me. Thus Levinas's philosophy of the other both affirms separateness between immanence and transcendence, while, at the same, theorizing the body as site of revelation, as broken embodiment of the spiritual. This coexistence of separation and, at the same time, correlation between immanence and transcendence in the Levinasian face, helps one to understand what Eric L. Santner has recently described as "*Rosenzweig's paradox*."³⁴ Revelation in Rosenzweig (and later in Levinas's face) does not remove us from the world in which it is taking place; rather it brings us closer to an understanding of the spiritual validity that enfolds our mundane activities. Why, however, does Rosenzweig insist on separation? The discussion above as regards Levinas's critique of totality helps us to understand Rosenzweig's concern with the separate existence of the three entities, man, God, and world, because the Levinasian face embodies both the worldly and the other-worldly without reducing the one to the other (that would precisely be totality).

III

What impact did Rosenzweig's idiosyncratic analysis of the loss of worldly transcendence have on his understanding of Judaism? In order to address this issue I will first engage in a reading of the essays "Atheistic Theology" and "Apologetic Thinking" before examining Rosenzweig's turning the tables on Hegel's metaphysics of eating in the last part of *The Star*. In his essay "Atheistic Theology" (1914) Rosenzweig examines the pseudotheological pattern that informs "modern" anti-Semitism. He does so by analyzing the total erosion of otherness that, as has been discussed above, goes hand in hand with German idealism's attempt at translating the worldly (the body) into the other-worldly (the body politic). As we shall see, Rosenzweig (here following the German idealists) identifies this otherness of the worldly with Jewishness. It should be noted that, in "Atheistic Theology," he examines the close relationship between a philosophical conception of human autonomy and nationalist politics: "Instead of trying—in the eternity of philosophical thought or in the temporality of the historical process—to show the human under the might of the divine, one tries, on the contrary, to understand the divine as the self-projection of the human into the heaven of myth. Here the people [*Volk*] is the human actuality, which as such already recommends

³⁴ Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 66.

itself as a content of faith to a positivistically meticulous generation.”³⁵ Rosenzweig argues that Feuerbach’s critique of religion, as self-projection of the human onto a divine image, radicalizes the Kantian demand for human autonomy. As in *The Star*, idealism marks a historical and theological break. Whereas preidealistic thought represents humanity to be subservient to the power of a deity, with the Feuerbachian radicalization of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, man himself has a right to the potential, which he timidly projected onto a supernatural force. Yet, the empowerment of the human has quite inhuman consequences, for it results in the pseudotheological deification of a nationalist body politic. Paradoxically the translation of heaven onto earth turns the worldly into the transcendent or other (or that which Rosenzweig calls *Jenseits*) within a world that has now become—according to this new cultural perception—the other-worldly. Thus, the immanent entity nation (*das Volk*) now fills the space of belief-content (*Glaubensinhalt*) that had previously been occupied by transcendent concepts.

How does the notion *Volk* fit into either Kant’s or Feuerbach’s philosophy? It clearly does not belong to either of them. What about Richard Wagner? In the passage above, Rosenzweig does not refer to specific writers, he only uses key terms like *Selbstprojektion*, which are citations from specific theoretical texts. But he employs these citations as markers that point to the work of individual thinkers. Does Rosenzweig posit a German transcendental trajectory from Kant, via Hegel and Feuerbach, to Wagner? In a letter of August 4, 1909, to Hans Ehrenberg he does precisely this. He calls Wagner a “gateway” (*Einfalltor*): “From his [Wagner’s] the path leads on the one hand via Feuerbach to Hegel and on the other to Hegel too, via the Young-German movement.”³⁶ In this letter Rosenzweig speaks of his plan to write a dissertation (what would then materialize as his book *Hegel and the State*) about this line that goes backward from Wagner to German transcendental philosophy. This retrospective investigation would uncover the foundation of “the empire as such, even if only

³⁵ Franz Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. with notes and commentary by Paul W. Frank and Michael L. Morgan, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 17. “Statt—in der Ewigkeit des philosophischen Gedankens oder in der Zeitlichkeit des geschichtlichen Prozesses—das Menschliche unter der Gewalt des Göttlichen zu zeigen, versucht man, umgekehrt das Göttliche als die Selbstprojektion des Menschlichen an den Himmel des Mythos zu verstehen. Das Volk ist hier die menschliche Wirklichkeit; die sich schon als solche einem positivistisch gewissenhaften Geschlecht zum Glaubensinhalt empfiehlt” (Franz Rosenzweig, “Atheistische Theologie [1914],” in *Kleinere Schriften* [Berlin: Schocken, 1937], pp. 278–90, 283–84).

³⁶ “Von ihm [Wagner] führt der Weg einerseits über Feuerbach zu Hegel, andererseits über die Jungdeutschen z. T. auch zu Hegel” (Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, ed. Edith Rosenzweig and Ernst Simon [Berlin: Schocken, 1935], p. 43).

in its 'cultural' aspect."³⁷ Far from belittling the role of culture for an understanding of German history, Rosenzweig emphasizes the thin line that links German national culture to German politics: "Little distance lies between 'culture' and the 'gun'" (*Von der "Kultur" zur "Kanone" ist ein kleiner Schritt*).³⁸ As we shall see in the following paragraphs, Rosenzweig indeed analyzes the pseudotheological paradigm that has shaped German national culture.

By forming a total unity with the transcendent, the immanent term "nation" has occupied the theological position of otherness, that is to say, of transcendence. In "Atheistic Theology" he examines how the philosophical concept of autonomy results, on a political plane, in the "rationalist deification of the people [*Volk*]."³⁹ Thus, German nationalism set out to make the other-worldly immanent by means of nationalistic politics. Wagner—radicalizing Hegel—justified this reconciliation of the state with both religion and art by referring to the transcendence of empirical life as demanded by the patriotic call to "selfless sacrifices" for the "greater good" of the nation. Rosenzweig emphasizes that this pseudotheology that informs nationalistic politics differs not only from Jewish but also traditional Christian thought: "Instead of asserting God's becoming human, one asserted His being human; instead of His descent to the mountain of the giving of the law, the autonomy of the moral law."⁴⁰ Whereas traditional Christian thought focuses on the possible return of the human to the state of being created in His image, modern nationalism makes use of a pseudotheology that proclaims the divinity of man. Rosenzweig aligns this deification of humanity with the Kantian autonomy of the moral law, which he contrasts with the revelation of Mosaic legislation.

In what way can a theory that announces the deification of humanity demand the death of human bodies? This question sheds light on the contradictions inherent in a kind of humanism that could be instrumentalized by nationalist thought (such as Wagner's). As we have seen, German transcendental philosophy posited human self-sufficiency only with regard to the nonbodily aspect of humanity, and thus radically rejected

³⁷ "Das Imperium schlechthin, wenn auch selbst nur in 'kultureller' Beziehung" (*ibid.*, p. 44).

³⁸ *Ibid.* Compare Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism," in his *Divided Passions* (n. 11 above), pp. 283–310.

³⁹ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 18. "Rationalistische[n] Vergötterung des Volks" ("Atheistische Theologie," p. 284).

⁴⁰ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 18. "Statt der Menschwerdung behauptete man so das Menschsein Gottes, statt seines Niedersteigens zum Berge der Gesetzgebung die Autonomie des Sittengesetzes" ("Atheistische Theologie," p. 285).

The Journal of Religion

the spiritual validity of the body. This is exactly what Marx criticized in his "Theses on Feuerbach," when he set out to appreciate human bodily practice over and against idealist contemplation of the sensuous as something that has to be overcome: "he [Feuerbach] regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation."⁴¹ Here Marx alludes to the idealist equation of the body with the Judaic. As a result of this rejection of sensuousness, German idealism deifies humanity only with a view to the autonomous and therefore immanent transcendence of bodily needs. There are contradictions as far as the issue of autonomy is concerned: the individual's rational capability needs to be embedded in a civil society that proscribes the forgoing of sensuous interests.⁴² Thus, Marx replaces "'civil' society" with "*human* society, or socialized humanity,"⁴³ in which the bodily needs of individuals matter as much as their intellectual aspirations.

How does Marx's critique of Feuerbach illuminate Rosenzweig's discourse about the inhumanity of the humanism in German idealism? As we have seen, in "Atheistic Theology" Rosenzweig cites the Feuerbachian unmasking of the divine as self-projection of the human. In the paragraph above this citation, he examines the pseudotheological foundations of racism, which only apparently develop from "pseudonaturalism." If the deification of humanity amounts to that of the nation, then the making transcendent of the national also invests race with divine attributes. Indeed, according to Rosenzweig's analysis, humanity—liberated from its "dirty" body—becomes divine in the nation and the divine being of this nonbodily body politic has, in turn, its foundation in what German nationalists consider to be the divine purity of race. He does not dispute the connections between this threefold idolization—in which the human falls into place with nation and race—and idealism, but he nevertheless draws attention to the emphasis on the pseudonaturalist term "race" that clearly deviates from German transcendental philosophy: "A representation of people [*Volk*] developed, not without contact with that older conception of peoplehood [*Volkstumsbegriff*] of German Idealism, yet nevertheless essentially new, which granted it the rank of an eternal existence. He who is able to see through the pseudonaturalist wrappings of the race idea, to which this idea owes its broad popularity, recognizes here the striving to transform the concept of peoplehood in such a way that the people maintain the right to exist simply from their existence, independently of their

⁴¹ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 143–45, 143.

⁴² Compare Mack's "The Metaphysics of Eating."

⁴³ Marx, p. 145.

factual achievements.”⁴⁴ By looking through the pseudonaturalist veils of the notion race, Rosenzweig thus analyzes the pseudotheology that substantiates and grounds pseudoscientific racism. Racism draws its absolutist claims to truth from a strange conflation between the immanent and the transcendent, even though racists do of course not theoretically reflect on this issue. With disregard to the realm of sensuous practice, racism deifies a specific group of people with exclusive reference to its being as such. Rosenzweig discusses this *Dasein* (being) of the people a few paragraphs below as the *Menschsein* of God. He does so in the citation quoted above, in which he differentiates the gradual incarnation of Christ in the human body (*Menschwerdung*), with the deification of a nonbodily humanity that results in the idolization of the people as an invincible body politic.

By positing humanity in terms of nonbodily spirit, German idealism does not allow for the contingencies or imperfections of bodily existence. Rosenzweig distinguishes this kind of humanism from the racism in the late nineteenth century, but he emphasizes that such disregard for the needs of empirical life lays open the possibility for a nationalist as well as racist conception of the body politic. He points out that racism disguises a pseudotheology behind its apparent naturalism, for racist discourse depicts both nation and “national blood” with the language of absolute self-sufficiency that has traditionally been employed to characterize the divine. This is what Rosenzweig means, when he writes that the sheer being of the people justifies its fantasized existence: race and nation are idols that demand in their quasi divinity the lifeblood of “unworthy” empirical bodies.

Presentations of an invincible “Aryan” body strike us as naturalistic. Rosenzweig argues that this apparent naturalism makes for the popularity of racist ideology, but it obfuscates the latter’s pseudotheological foundations. Against the background of Rosenzweig’s analysis, racist and nationalist glorifications of muscular strength serve to emphasize an ideal body that has overcome its frailty and contingency and can thus serve a body politic that sets out to do away with otherness. This explains the obsession with the “Jewish body” in racist discourse, for it stigmatizes “Jewishness”—via a bizarre depiction of physical features—in terms of

⁴⁴ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 16–17. “Nicht ohne Berührung mit jenem älteren Volkstumsbegriff des deutschen Idealismus, aber doch wesentlich neu, bildete sich eine Vorstellung von Volk, die ihm den Rang seiner Daseinsberichtigung einräumte. Wer es vermag, durch die pseudonaturalistischen Umhüllungen des Rassebegriffs, denen dieser seine breite Popularität verdankt, hindurchzuschauen, der erkennt hier das Bestreben, den Volksbegriff so umzubilden, daß das Volk unabhängig von sachlichen Leistungen einfach aus seinem Dasein das Recht dazusein schöpft” (“Atheistische Theologie,” p. 283).

The Journal of Religion

illness, which is another word for the frailty and the contingency of empirical existence.

How does Rosenzweig's examination of the pseudothology behind racism's apparent pseudonaturalism, affect the development of his own Jewish theology? In the essay "Apologetic Thinking" he underlines the social and political consequences of representing otherness in a derogatory manner by asking his reader, "can the other, if he is as I here depict him, still—live?"⁴⁵ The depiction of rabbinic Judaism as legalism without spirit denies the life of Jews: "These legalistic machines, lacking humor and soul, whom the Christian so gladly represents under the [name] 'Pharisees,' would be incapable of living."⁴⁶ In the same essay Rosenzweig emphasizes that this derogatory depiction of Judaism by Christian thinkers also has an impact on Jewish thought that reacts against such prejudicial discourse. In this way, modern Jewish philosophy has an apologetic dimension to it: "apologetic thinking remains dependent on the cause, the adversary. And in this sense Jewish thinking remains apologetic thinking"⁴⁷ Rosenzweig attempts to break with apologetic thinking that justifies the validity of a Jewish way of life by pointing out its basic congruency with the non-Jewish majority culture. In his essay "The New Learning," he argues that Jewish thought needs to find a path to the heart of Jewish life, instead of proving a relation between the "Jewish (*Jüdischem*)" and the "non-Jewish (*Außerjüdischem*)."⁴⁸

This is exactly what Rosenzweig does in *The Star of Redemption*: he affirms the difference between the Jewish and the non-Jewish world.⁴⁹ As we shall see in the concluding part to this article, in this affirmation, he follows a Hegelian metaphysics of eating, while, at the same time, turning

⁴⁵ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (n. 35 above), p. 100. "Kann der andre, wenn er so ist, wie ich ihn hier abmale, denn noch—leben?" ("Apologetisches Denken: Bemerkungen zu Brod und Baeck," in *Kleinere Schriften* [n. 35 above], pp. 31–42, 35).

⁴⁶ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 101. "Nicht lebensfähig wären diese humor- und seelenlosen Gesetzesmaschinen, die sich der Christ so gern unter den 'Pharisäern' vorstellt" ("Apologetisches Denken," p. 35).

⁴⁷ "Apologetisches Denken bleibt abhängig von der Veranlassung, vom Gegner. Und in diesem Sinn bleibt jüdisches Denken apologetisches Denken" ("Apologetisches Denken," p. 33). Compare Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig," in *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929): Internationaler Kongreß—Kassel 1986, band 1, Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, ed. Wolfdieter Schmed-Kowarzik (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1988), pp. 213–23.

⁴⁸ Rosenzweig, "Neues Lernen: Entwurf der Rede zur Eröffnung des Freien Jüdischen Lehrhauses (1920)" (*Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 94–99, 97).

⁴⁹ Batnitzky sets the records straight by showing that Rosenzweig did not, as has often been claimed by Christian theologians, theorize the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in terms of mutual affirmation. Instead, he describes this dialogue in terms of mutual judgment. In this way "Judaism's prideful particularity saves Christianity from its own totalitarian tendency to believe that it has reached its goal" (Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000], p. 158).

the tables on Hegel's speculative account of spirit. Thus, Rosenzweig's nonapologetic thought responds to the prejudicial account of Judaism as given in Kant's and Hegel's transcendental philosophy. This response does not internalize the charges that both German idealists level against rabbinic Judaism.

IV

Following Mendelssohn⁵⁰ and Cohen, Rosenzweig depicts Judaism in terms of an interchange between learning and action, between human subjectivity and its engaging relationship with the external world. However, whereas Mendelssohn and, to some extent Cohen, do not take issue with an idealist dismissal of material practice and heteronomy, Rosenzweig—here following Marx⁵¹—criticizes the German idealist attempt to translate heaven onto earth to the detriment of earthly life. The reconception of the worldly as the other-worldly by means of a translation of the body into an idealist body politic does not put an end to theology; rather it turns the rejected material basis of life into the transcendent other of reason's autonomy.

When he thus saw in the Jewish the embodiment of the other, Rosenzweig follows the line drawn by German transcendental philosophy. However, whereas Kant and Hegel built their respective systems on the ground of the exclusion of this flesh and blood otherness, Rosenzweig made it the cornerstone of his affirmation of modern Jewish thought. Why, however, did he characterize the Jewish people as a community of blood? This characterization has proven to be quite controversial, and critics have not tired of defending Rosenzweig against the charges of racism. In the most recent defense, Leora Batnitzky maintained, "'the blood community' is a philosophical construct that is meant to undo the priority of philosophical constructs."⁵² This raises the question as to which line of thought Rosenzweig's community of blood refers. Does he mainly have philosophy as such in mind, or does he not rather undermine the philosophical and theological espousal of political violence?

As has been discussed at the beginning of this article, *The Star* opens with an outspoken critique of German idealism's rejection of the body's independence from the body politic. How does this relate to Rosenzweig's

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Mendelssohn's influence on Rosenzweig, see *ibid.* Compare Michael Mack's review of *Idolatry and Representation* in *Journal of Religion* 81 (April 2001): 312–13.

⁵¹ There are only a few references to Marx in Rosenzweig's work. However, as a letter of August 19, 1917, illustrates, he was familiar with the complexities of Marxian thought. There he appreciates Marx's defense of the rights of the individual over and against the interference of the state. Compare Rosenzweig, *Briefe* (n. 35 above), p. 260.

⁵² Batnitzky, p. 74.

The Journal of Religion

peculiar conflation of the Jewish people with the life substance blood at the end of *The Star*? Critics have so far not paid sufficient attention to the element with which he contrasts blood. He clearly elaborates on a contrast concerning the Jewish and the Gentile world, while allocating blood to the one and earth to the other: "We were the only ones who trusted in blood and abandoned the land; and so we preserved the priceless sap of life which pledged us that it would be eternal. Among the peoples of the world [*Erde*], we are the only ones who separated what lived within us from all community with what is dead."⁵³ Here Rosenzweig makes it clear that his notion of blood reacts only against those philosophical concepts that set out to justify the shedding of blood for the political possession of land. He associates the earth with death and blood with life, and it this clinging to life that distinguishes the Jews from a postidealist Gentile world in which such behavior has been demoted as "unheroic," "nonidealist," and—as Hegel would call it—"nondialectical."

What constitute the relations between Hegel's metaphysics of eating and Rosenzweig's philosophical opposition between an identity that sees itself grounded in blood and one that demands the conquest of land? As I have discussed elsewhere, Hegel ontologizes war and sacrifice by focusing on the process of eating.⁵⁴ Consumption of food delineates the dialectics of everyday life, since the one who eats realizes the similarities between his or her own bodily constitution and the empirical object of nutrition that he or she is in the process of consuming. Thus, to eat means to sacrifice, and to sacrifice means to eat.

Rosenzweig does not discuss the topic of eating in his book on *Hegel and the State*, but he does analyze Hegel's philosophical appraisal as regards the sacrifice of the individual for the "greater good of the state."⁵⁵ He detects an uncanny conflation of the state with the notion of destiny as a result of which the individual has no theological and philosophical justification to avoid the sacrifice of his or her life as demanded by this political unity that speaks with the inevitable voice of the pagan deity "fate."⁵⁶ Thus, in his book on Hegel, Rosenzweig analyses speculative thought as a philosophical deification of politics: the "thinker in the state (*Denker im Staat*)" promotes the opposite of "human rights (*Menschen-*

⁵³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (n. 1 above), p. 299. "Wir allein vertrauten dem Blut und ließen das Land; also sparten wir den kostbaren Lebenssaft, der uns Gewähr der eigenen Ewigkeit bot, und lösten allein unter allen Völkern der Erde unser Lebendiges aus jeder Gemeinschaft der Toten" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, [n. 1 above], p. 332).

⁵⁴ Compare Michael Mack, "The Metaphysics of Eating" (n. 33 above).

⁵⁵ It has so far remained unexamined. For Rosenzweig's analysis of this point, see his *Hegel und der Staat* (Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1920), 2:243.

⁵⁶ "Und dieses Schicksals ein Teil ist der Staat! Das ist der Augenblick, wo jede Staatsansicht, die den Einzelnen vor dem Ganzen sähe, ein Unding geworden ist" (*ibid.*, 2:88).

rechte),” and he thereby refrains from making “justice” the ethical yardstick of his philosophical system.⁵⁷

Following the guidelines of human rights, justice would insist on the respect for the life of the individual over and against the political demands for an increase in possession of land, as put forth by state authorities. As we have seen, Hegel focused on the prohibition against eating blood as proof for the lack of both speculative and statelike thinking in rabbinic Judaism. He contrasted the respect for the the blood of life with the secularized Christian notion of the modern state. The members of this state are true dialecticians in that they have realized—by way of speculation—the nothingness of their own blood that can therefore willingly be shed for the becoming of the state.

Now against this idealist notion of freedom as the liberation from bodily existence, Rosenzweig defines freedom as saying no to nothingness,⁵⁸ but this no does not denote the rational invalidity of immediate being, as Hegel would have had it. On the contrary, the nothing refers to the destruction of the external world, which Rosenzweig’s theology of creation perceives to be the work of a divine creator who in the beginning acted freely by saying no to a world emptied of empirical matter. If the reference to freedom in *The Star* concerns the free act of creation, Rosenzweig has human freedom in mind when he writes in “‘The Germ Cell’ of the Star of Redemption” (letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg, November 18, 1917) about liberty in contrast to its idealist conception as autonomy: “My ‘freedom,’ and to be sure not my freedom as the philosophers lie about it, in that they draw off from it the red blood of arbitrariness and let it run into the vessel of ‘sensuousness,’ of ‘drive,’ of ‘motives,’ and admit as freedom only the bloodless residue of obedience to the law.”⁵⁹ Here Rosenzweig reconfigures the Hegelian topics blood, immediate being, and freedom. Thus, freedom consists in saying no to death by affirming the spiritual validity of one’s blood, that is to say, of one’s bodily life.

In this way, the idealist slavery to the goods of this world describes Rosenzweig’s notion of freedom. A reversal has taken place in which the one who inverts a philosophical paradigm at the same time mimics its ideational structure. Rosenzweig agrees with the idealist depiction of Jew-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ For Rosenzweig’s discussion of God’s freedom as saying no to nothingness, see *Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The New Thinking*, trans. and ed. Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 57. “Meine ‘Freiheit’ und zwar nicht meine Freiheit wie sie die Philosophen umlügen, indem sie ihr das rote Blut der Willkür abzapfen und es in das Gefäß der ‘Sinnlichkeit,’ des ‘Triebes,’ der ‘Motive’ laufen lassen und nur den blutlosen Rückstand des Gehorsams gegen das Gesetz der Freiheit kennen wollen” (“‘Urzelle’ des Stern der Erlösung: Brief an Rudolf Ehrenberg vom 18. XI. 1917,” in *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 357–72, 366).

ishness as sensuousness, as blood, but at the same time he does not deprive the “stuff” that constitutes life of spiritual as well as intellectual validity. Instead, Hegel’s spirit turns out to be without spirit, for the speculative penetration to the essence of immediate being opens the way to a compulsive denial of life that sustains not so much the survival of the individual but works for the aggrandizement of a political unity—the state. By grounding Jewish identity in blood as juice of life and by opposing this identity to the political will for the conquest of land, Rosenzweig undermines German idealism’s attempt to translate the body into the body politic. The state sets out to glorify its power by shedding blood in order to gain possession of yet-to-be-conquered land. This triumph of one state over other states through the domination of their space would realize Hegel’s absolute spirit that turns *Weltgeschichte* (world history) into the *Weltgericht* (judgment on the world).

Critics have not noticed that Rosenzweig reverses Hegel’s metaphysics of eating when he opposes Jewish identity, as defined in terms of blood, with a non-Jewish world that sacrifices the juice of life for the establishment of power structures. If Hegel has maintained that the prohibition on the consumption of blood evidences a nonspiritual as well as nonintellectual and illusionary clinging to immediate being, then Rosenzweig turns the tables on Hegel’s speculative dialectics when he argues that the chosen people are chosen precisely because they do not have a state and therefore refrain from sacrificing life for an increase in political power.

Rosenzweig’s writing on the blood community of the Jewish people might well be indebted to Schelling, who, according to a recent study, stood out among German idealists by not taking part in a derogatory discourse about both Jews and Judaism.⁶⁰ Whereas Hegel denied the Jews any participation in the sphere of spirit with direct reference to the dietary laws that forbid a violation of immediate being, Schelling argued that the Jews are chosen (and are thereby an example for the rest of humanity) on account of their nonparticipation in the violent struggles between different nations and different political states.

Rosenzweig has no doubt found ample support in Schelling for his critique of Hegel as a dialectician of the state. However, his conception of a Jewish identity that consists mainly in living in blood with a view of living in life constitutes an original response to a metaphysics of eating according to which one comes closer to spirit by consuming the juice of life. In Hegel’s view, this consumption makes the eater aware of the nothingness, or in other words, the illusion of immediate being—that of his or her own body included. I would therefore offer a new reading of Rosen-

⁶⁰ See Micha Brumlik’s *“Deutscher Geist und Judenhass”: Das Verhältnis des philosophischen Idealismus zum Judentum* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000).

zweig's notions of blood and earth. From this perspective, the former resembles the body, and the latter symbolizes the body politic, which demands the shedding of the juice of life for gaining possession of land.

Accordingly, Rosenzweig's Jewish critique of history has a "a bearing on the ultimate course of world-history."⁶¹ Strikingly, he argues that the Jews remain outside the realm of both history and politics for precisely the reason that they live in their blood. In this way, he conceives of the historical along the lines of Hegelian speculative thought with the crucial difference, however, that he refuses to endow the politics of nations and states with either a spiritual or an intellectual aura. In a fascinating agreement with Hegel, who calls war the true realization of idealism, and who refers to a metaphysics of eating in order to exclude Jewishness from both idealism and the realm of political struggle, Rosenzweig argues that the Jew is the only pacifist in a Christian world: "In the whole Christian world, the Jew is practically the only human being who cannot take war seriously, and this makes him the only genuine pacifist. For that reason, and because he experiences perfect community in his spiritual year, he remains remote from the chronology of the rest of the world."⁶² Significantly, Rosenzweig defines Jewish identity by a refusal to take war seriously. In so doing, he concurs with Hegel's analysis of Judaism while at the same time depriving speculative thought of its spiritual costume. Behind the nothingness of immediate being we do not encounter a becoming. To think that way means to fall prey to an idealist illusion. Thus dwelling outside the sphere of worldly time—namely, history—the Jews help to preserve worldly life by living in the blood of life rather than living for the deadness of the earth.

Paradoxically, Rosenzweig's other-worldly community establishes the spiritual and intellectual validity of the this-worldly. This paradox is related to the paradox of idealism: on the opening pages of *The Star* we read that with Kant and Hegel, the immanent has become the transcendent. German transcendental philosophy does not tolerate the needs of the body, which it conflates with the essence of Judaism. Responding to the idealist paradigm in a nonapologetic mode, Rosenzweig argues that the people of God (*Gottesvolk*) represent the eternal within transitory time: "So far as God's people is concerned, eternity has already come—even in the midst of time! For the nations of the world there is only the current era. But the state symbolizes the attempt to give nations eternity within

⁶¹ Mendes-Flohr, "Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig" (n. 46 above), p. 221.

⁶² Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 331. "Ja der Jude ist eigentlich der einzige Mensch in der christlichen Welt, der den Krieg nicht ernst nehmen kann, und so ist er der einzige echte 'Pazifist.' So aber scheidet er sich, gerade weil er die vollkommene Gemeinschaft in seinem geistlichen Jahr erlebt, ab von der weltlichen Zeitrechnung." (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 368).

The Journal of Religion

the confines of time, an attempt which must of necessity be repeated again and again.”⁶³ The state attempts to endow its people with eternity by trying to turn world history into the judgment on the world, whereas the Jews, having no state, live the eternal within time. Rosenzweig here discusses Hegel (whom, as we have seen, he calls the “thinker of the state”) without mentioning his name. The state holds out the promise of immanent eternity through a violent transformation of the worldly into the other-worldly, as achieved through the immanent translation of the body (blood) into the body politic (conquered and accumulated land). In Rosenzweig’s analysis, this idealization of war represents secularized Christian thought, which has now turned into totalitarian politics.

Jewish particularity helps to promote the redemption of the world by reminding the universal of its incompleteness and thus keeps it from turning totalitarian. However, German transcendental philosophy set out to separate “Christian essence” from its Jewish foundations, and in doing so it attempted to free itself from this remainder of incompleteness. Thus the Christian state sees Jewishness as “competitor (*Nebenbuhler*)”⁶⁴ to its attempt at making the earth eternal by warlike means. Rosenzweig’s critique of the idealist conflation of politics and Christian essence points to the pseudotheological underpinnings of nationalism. In contrast to the pagan, the modern Christian state does not recognize mortality, and as a result, Christ’s sacrifice undergoes an immanent transformation into the individual’s sacrifice for the state in which, by way of Hegelian dialectics, the death of being (the body, that is to say, the blood of life) turns into becoming (the body politic, that is to say, the state, which attempts to conquer the earth).

With what kind of theology does Rosenzweig counterpose the pseudo-theology of nationalism and anti-Semitism? His nonapologetic Jewish philosophy goes hand in hand with a theory of Jewish law: “For in the law everything of this world that is comprised in it, all created existence, is already given life and soul directly as content of the world to come.”⁶⁵ The law mediates between God and world and thereby prohibits any violation of life. Thus, Rosenzweig contrasts the violent production of the other-worldly out of the material of the worldly, with the respect for immediate being as found in rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic law endows the body with spiritual validity: “The Jew sanctified his flesh and blood under

⁶³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (n. 1 above), p. 332. “Im Gottesvolk ist das Ewige schon da, mitten in der Zeit. In den Völkern der Welt ist reine Zeitlichkeit. Aber der Staat ist der notwendig immer zu erneuernde Versuch, den Völkern in der Zeit Ewigkeit zu geben” (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, [n. 1 above], p. 369).

⁶⁴ Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 369.

⁶⁵ “Im Gesetz ist eben alles Diesseitige, was darin ergriffen wird, alles geschaffene Dasein, schon unmittelbar zum Inhalt der künftigen Welt belebt und beseelt” (*ibid.*, p. 451).

the yoke of the law, and thereby lives constantly in the reality of the heavenly kingdom; the Christian's constant profane flesh and blood sets itself in opposition to redemption, and he learns that he himself is not permitted to anticipate redemption emotionally."⁶⁶ The "yoke of the law" does not describe the slavery to the "goods of this world" as Kant has argued; rather it prepares the ground for a bodily existence that has regained its spiritual validity. According to Rosenzweig, the law sanctifies (*heiligen*) the body. Thus, a life according to the law opens up a perspective onto the revelation that dwells in the work of creation.

This coincidence between revelation and creation describes the work of redemption, which unfolds in human works of love. By keeping the law, the Jew, in Rosenzweig's view, enacts love, for he or she respects the life of immediate being. This is precisely what Hegel attacks in his metaphysics of eating: he sees in Jewish law a restriction on humanity's autonomy, which should recreate—or in Rosenzweig's terminology—produce a perfect other-worldly body politic out of the imperfection of a bodily and therefore contingent world. Rosenzweig agrees with Hegel's description of Judaism, but he does not concur with his philosophical conclusions. The Jew, who lives according to the law, lives in the blood, for she or he sees the empirical world to be correlated to God's creation. This correlation demands works of love. Thus, Jewish law does not counteract charity, as has often been proclaimed in the theology of postreformation Christianity; instead, law enacts love. God's commandments to love are prohibitions against the violation of life: "The commandments of God, as far as they belong to that 'second tablet' which specifies the love of neighbor, are throughout phrased in the form 'Thou shalt not.' They cannot assume the garb of laws except as prohibitions, as delineation of the boundaries of that which can on no account be reconciled with love of neighbor."⁶⁷ Hegel's metaphysics of eating takes issue with precisely these prohibitions against the violation of "immediate being." According to Hegel, they are irrational, since they contradict a notion of rationality, which German transcendental philosophy circumscribes as human autonomy. Rosenzweig, however, affirms the *raison d'être* of the law's taboo-like apparel, which consists in safeguarding the survival of empirical life.

⁶⁶ "Indem der Jude, weil er sein Fleisch und Blut unter dem Joch des Gesetzes heiligte, ständig in der Wirklichkeit des Himmelreichs lebt, lernt der Christ, daß es ihm selber nicht erlaubt ist, die Erlösung, gegen die sich sein stets unheiliges Fleisch und Blut zur Wehr setzt, im Gefühl vorwegzunehmen" (*ibid.*, p. 460).

⁶⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 216. "Die Gebote Gottes, soweit zur 'zweiten Tafel' gehören, welche die Liebe des Nächsten spezifiziert, stehen durchweg in der Form des 'Du sollst nicht.' Nur als Verbote, nur in der Absteckung von Grenzen dessen, was keineswegs mit der Liebe zum Nächsten vereinbar ist, können sie Gesetzeskleid anziehen" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 241).

The Journal of Religion

As we have seen, Levinas defines the love of that which lies in immediate proximity (*Liebe zum Nächsten*) as heteronomy, thus employing a term that Kant and Hegel have used in order to prove the irrationality of Judaism. Rosenzweig's nonapologetic Jewish thought describes this concern for the well being of the external world in terms of love. Law, which helps to set limits to violence, constitutes the rationality of *caritas*, as Rosenzweig understands it. The concept of living in blood undermines the apparent rationality of Hegel's speculative dialectics. In doing so, Rosenzweig calls into question the purported autonomy of a body politic that consumes bodies in order to turn world history into the judgment on the world.