

Metaethics – An Ontological Analysis Regarding Man in Franz Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*


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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Man, metaethics, Rosenzweig, essence, personality, self, nothing, soul, God, world, Hegel.

Based mainly on part I of *the Star of Redemption (the Star)*, this paper is divided into three main parts. First of all, the first part will mention the new thinking and its circumstances. Rosenzweig criticizes both Kant (man as a moral entity) and Hegel (the notion of totality and reduction of man to spirit). Rosenzweig justifies the need for a new thinking as follows: philosophy begins with “the fear of death.” Philosophy has until now endorsed man based on concepts and essences which are inevitably abstract. Thus, he calls for a radical “new thinking.” Next, three irreducible elements (God, world, and man) and the ontological analysis of personality is the content of the second part. Cohen’s infinitesimal calculus and how the three irreducible elements generate themselves out of their own particular nothings will be mentioned. Rosenzweig argues that personality, the first stage in the ontological analysis regarding man, is an inauthentic self. Thirdly, the main content of the third part is the ontological analysis of an authentic self in the second stage (character) and third stage (self). The shift from personality to character is significant. Character is non-relational because it is a self-enclosure. In addition, the writer focuses highly on the self in its entire form (“B=B”) as metaethics. Through these analyses, Rosenzweig proves that man is both finite and infinite. Furthermore, he uses the “soul” as the self that emerges at the intersubjective level. The “soul” is both beyond “personality”, “character” and even “metaethics”. And so, man is beyond metaethics and non-definitive. In conclusion, man is not only one element alongside but also in relation to God as a living subject (in part II of *the Star*).

Introduction

In general, traditional philosophy tries to enframe and reduce man in the system of essences in order to define man. It seems that the traditional views typically divide man into some main definitions, such as a mere entity within the physical world, a mere entity within the moral world (following Kant), and a separated body, soul, and spirit. However, in magnum opus *the Star*,¹ Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) constructs an original analysis to approach man, which is, metaethics. Generally, he rejects the foundational status of cognitive, representational thinking, and hence he rejects the general bias of the entire classical tradition of philosophy from Parmenides to Hegel, particularly in the definition of man.

The writer proves that Rosenzweig, when he deals with Idealism's heritage, institutes an independently ontological analysis to approach this issue. Obviously, starting from personality to self – as metaethics – is the chief flow. Rosenzweig clearly distinguishes an authentic self (character) from an inauthentic self (personality). And so, he preserves both the particularity of man and its capacity to open to relations with God and world. Furthermore, through the analysis towards “soul” at the end of Part I in *the Star*, the writer argues that Rosenzweig somehow succeeds in proving man is not only irreducible into essence but also opens up a new perspective on language and religion. Based mainly on Part I in *the Star*, our paper will be divided into three main parts.

First of all, this paper will mention the new thinking and its circumstances. The writer tries to illustrate some crucial points in terms of humans in the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. And so, Rosenzweig criticizes both Kant - human as moral entity – and Hegel – notion of totality and reduction of man to spirit. Next, Rosenzweig justifies the need for a new thinking as follows: philosophy² begins with “the fear of death.” Philosophy's response to this fear was to restrict the application of the term something (Etwas) solely for ideal, conceptual, unchanging entities. Hence, it judges the individuals of the sensible world to be nothing (Nichts). In particular, philosophy thus has until now endorsed man based on concepts which are inevitably abstract. Rosenzweig must also call philosophy into question. Thus, he calls for a radical “new thinking.”

Rosenzweig advocates the task of a thinking system from a quintessentially human standpoint. Indeed, that “all knowledge of the All begins in death, the fear of death” (SR, 4) suggests that an Absolute standpoint that claims to overcome the limits of human finitude will not yield true knowledge of the All, but rather a merely proper recognition of the unique character of the individual mortal human being might fulfill this task. As a result, Rosenzweig emphasizes the Particularity of Nothing as an alternative to the systematic starting point of German Idealism.

Secondly, three irreducible elements and the ontological analysis of personality are the content of the second part. To some extent, the first part of *the Star* aims to show how the three particular elemental beings – God, world, man – generate themselves out of their own particular nothings. At this stage, the writer briefs the infinitesimal calculus of Hermann Cohen which is rooted in concepts of *Nichts* as a fundamental method in Rosenzweig's analysis. And so, through two ways of affirmation and negation, two of three irreducible elements will be presented in a purely analytic equation: God in “A=A”; world in “B=A”. Beginning with three irreducible elements,

¹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (1921), trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985) [henceforth “the Star” in body text and “SR” in shortened notes]. The translations from *the Star* into English given throughout the paper are Hallo English translations, but in reading, I have consulted the original German text in special cases. In 2005, Barbara Galli also published a new English translation.

² By “philosophy,” Rosenzweig means the tradition that begins with Parmenides to Hegel (SR, 3).

Rosenzweig rejects the unity of being, a unity based on the unity of being and thinking started by Parmenides. The starting point for a genuine appreciation of man comes from a clear acceptance of an irreducible reality, where man is an independent element alongside of the world and to God, all three of which are fundamentally independent of one another.

Concerning personality, Rosenzweig begins with everyday life. The self as “personality” is determined superficially by social roles and lacks an inner relation to its own death. The inadequacy of self qua personality comes from over-attachment to the world. The personality is content to wear the masks of the world, to play a role on the world’s stage, to be projected out into the world, dispersed in the world. That is the reason why Rosenzweig uses the same equation for representing both world and personality as “B=A”. As a result, the writer puts the first stage in the ontological analysis of self, namely personality, in this part.

Thirdly, the third part of this paper will mention the second and third stage in the ontological analysis regarding authentic self. Rosenzweig focuses on this analysis to prove that self is self-enclosure and inward-directed. The second stage will illustrate Rosenzweig’s procedure from human idiosyncrasy to character. The shift from personality to character entails a retrospective recognition of the inadequacy and superficiality of everydayness. Character is non-relational. It is non-relational because it is a self-relationship or self-enclosure. Furthermore, the self in its entire form, that is in “B=B”, will be mentioned. The self somehow is inward-directed and centripetal. The self is “solitary man in the hardest sense of the word” and “the self does not live in a moral world: it has its *ethos*. The self is metaethical.” (SR, 73) Through these analyses, the writer proves that man is both finite and infinite.

Nevertheless, the most significant stage is the third and higher stage, which Rosenzweig names the “soul”. The “soul” is both beyond “personality,” “character,” and even “metaethics”. “Soul” is precisely the self that emerges at the intersubjective level. Intersubjectivity, for Rosenzweig, introduces a new and irreducible level of significance to subjectivity. The subjectivity awakened in intersubjectivity – the “soul” – opens up a new level for the self, indeed, a whole new way of life. The writer argues that Rosenzweig’s ontological analysis proves man is beyond metaethics. It leads to the conclusion that Rosenzweig constructs an original and independent ontological analysis to approach man.

In conclusion, man is not only one element alongside (in part I of *the Star*) but also in relation to the world and to God, all three of which are fundamentally independent of one another and yet at the same time in relation to one another. To think precisely this sort of relationality, where the terms of the relations are both in and out of relation, exceeds the capacities of philosophy.³ To properly grasp them, Rosenzweig turns to the language and experience of religion, opening to love in particular, in part II of *the Star*.

Chapter 1: Why The New Thinking

Circumstance and philosophical tradition regarding man

Circumstance

The traditional notion of essence is the primordial point concerning man that Rosenzweig criticizes in the philosophical systems. Whatever the range of notion concerning essence, it seems that this concept has been used exclusively as a dogmatic, and reductionist concept.

³ Again, concerning “philosophy,” Rosenzweig means the traditional philosophy “from Parmenides to Hegel” (SR, 3).

Insofar as traditional metaphysics has applied this concept to humanity, the same metaphysical qualities of a priori fixity and abstract identity pervade notions of human essence as well. The traditional philosophy has used the concept of essence which attempts to encompass and enframe man as a single, unchanging entity or a simple part of a whole. In particular, Rosenzweig proves that traditional philosophy restricts the application of the term something (Etwas) solely for ideal, conceptual, unchanging entities. By doing so it denies that what continuously changes is something. Hence, it judges the individuals of the sensible world to be nothing (Nichts). Philosophy thus has endorsed a human self-understanding based on concepts which are inevitably abstract (SR, 4-6). Consequently, Rosenzweig sees that there is transformation and continual alteration of status concerning man. There can be no definite essence to man. It implies that the concept of essence becomes meaningless.

The Star, conceived between 1916 and 1918 on the Balkan front, opens with the evocation of an experience at the outer limits of the extreme: the anguished cry of the individual before the threat of forthcoming death. That cry expresses at once the instinctive revolt of man against the violence of essence. And so, man affirms a basic, obvious truth: his irreducible identity as subject and the sudden collapse of all the philosophical constructions intended to make him forget the horror of death. It is at the moment when the individual, defined as a simple part of a whole, is threatened with annihilation that the subject awakens to the full consciousness of his uniqueness. The consciousness of man's mortal condition also reveals the irrefutable reality of his personal existence. "That is what specifically begins the very possibility of ethics, or more precisely, that is the point from which the meta-ethical dimension of the subject emerges."⁴

Obviously, his philosophical opponent is traditional "philosophy". By "philosophy," Rosenzweig does not only mean modern German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, but rather the entire history of philosophy, philosophy "from Parmenides to Hegel." Noticeably, these traditional definitions try to enframe and to reduce man into determinate definitions. In this essay, focusing on the arguments of Hegel in terms of the notion of totality and reduction of man to spirit which Rosenzweig criticizes is the most priority. However, considering Rosenzweig in relation to Kant's philosophy is necessary because of the notion of man as a mere entity in the moral world.

Kant

Even though the writer focuses mainly on Hegel rather than Kant, the role of Kant concerning Rosenzweig's analysis is also considerable. In fact, Rosenzweig 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 universal history, not only with his political philosophy and his philosophy of history, but already with his ethical fundamentals." (SR, 11). In case of man, Kant, as Rosenzweig reads him, demonstrated that human consciousness is reducible to acts of will that are radically different from all objects in the world of consciousness.⁵ Rosenzweig calls Traditional rational psychology negative psychology because moral thinking is the kind of thought that is most distinctive of the human psyche. It reaches its

⁴ Stéphane Mosès, "From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War," in *Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 222.

⁵ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Revelation and the God of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 66-67.

summit in Kant's analysis of human consciousness as a Transcendental Unity of Apperception (SR, 62).

Moreover, Kant goes on to argue from his first through his second critique of reason that man also is something a mere entity within the moral world. Kant, at least in the explanations of Kantian philosophers, says that only from the perspective of the whole of humanity can the individual reach his moral end. The categorical imperative relates to mankind at large and to the recognition by the acting human being that mankind in its ethical position is represented by and in the individual encounter.⁶ This interpretation of the moral sphere has its descriptive basis in Kant's anthropology, namely, that the goal of the human beings cannot be achieved within the limits of individuals but only within the scope of the human beings at large.⁷ Obviously, Rosenzweig explains Kantian moral philosophy: "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." (SR, 11)

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. The categorical imperative works without any considerations for the specific context in which a moral actor finds himself. Inverting the autonomy of the categorical imperative, metaethics places law at the service of empirical and contingent humanity so that "the law is given to man, not man to the law." (SR, 14) Immediately, Rosenzweig cites "this proposition is demanded by the new concept of man. It runs counter to the concept of law as it appears in the realm of the world as ethical reasoning and ethical order. Accordingly, this concept of man has to be characterized as metaethical." (Ibid.) 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). Metaethics thus refers to the independence of man, but this independence does not express human autonomy in the Kantian sense from which it differentiates itself. Rather, the notion of meta, metaethics in particular, is introduced in order to save the irreducible ontological position and thus the uniqueness of the respective sphere to which it refers (i.e. God, world, and man).⁸

Hegel

The most noticeable argument in Hegel's philosophy concerning man is his reduction of man to spirit. Hegel's account of spirit is his account of what is human in mankind. As with the other parts of his system, his *Philosophy of Spirit* is organized in triads, leading one to another. The first part he calls "Subjective Spirit," the second part "Objective Spirit," and the third part "Absolute Spirit". It is important to notice that the Objective Spirit comprises law, morality, economic and political organization, and the relationships of states to one another in the history of the world. This, according to Hegel, is spirit in a fuller sense than men's subjective feelings

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37.

⁷ Nathan Rotenstreich, "Rosenzweig's Notion of Metaethics," in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1988), 81-82.

⁸ Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 69.

and personal attitudes. The account he gives of Subjective Spirit, therefore, is preparatory to this and to his account of art, religion and philosophy in which mind achieves its highest status.⁹

Furthermore, what has to be specified in order to understand what follows is that Rosenzweig's critique of the Hegelian system of essences does not represent a specific and particular event in the thought of a philosopher (in Hegel's thought, in this case). In fact, it concerns the whole history of Western thought, of which Hegel is not simply an heir, but the most radical fulfillment. At the same time, Hegel is the paradigm of a philosophical operation and an instance that makes each infinitude the "missing" part of its own finitude, welding the two extremes (finite and infinite) in the totality, which is the perfect and total inclusion of the mediation. That, for Rosenzweig, is the great secret hidden beneath the whole philosophical adventure "from Ionia to Jena". There is, behind the history of Western metaphysics, an implicit maxim: the identity of being and totality. It is precisely that initial maxim that the preface of *the Star* sets out to question (SR, 3-4).

It leads to an original interrogation concerning the place of man – qua person in each case unique – at the heart of the idea of totality. However, in Hegel's philosophy, that idea aims to grasp phenomena in their generality, understanding them by integrating them into a network of rational explanations: in short, by enclosing them within one intelligible system, particularly the system of essences.¹⁰ Thus, the specificity of each individual, the singularity of his destiny, the uniqueness of the events that make up his life, will be perceived as illusions of subjective consciousness. The uniqueness of the self is then dissolved in the totality of being. The subject itself, stripped of its illusory singularity, will henceforth appear as but a simple element of the system enveloping it. According to Rosenzweig, that vision of being as absolute knowledge, the intelligible grouping of all particular phenomena, underlies the entire history of Western philosophy, culminating in German Idealism and finally triumphing in Hegel.

In Hegel's system, the history of philosophy as ontology is at once concluded and realized in the identity of being, reason, and totality. The fact that in such a system the diversity of individual views is always unmasked as the illusions of a subjective conscience leads necessarily to a conception of morality as the submission of subjective aspirations to a more general system of laws. It is true that, in that subordination of particular interests to a higher order, free will is transcended and realized as rational freedom; but in this permanent movement toward greater generality, freedom does not cease denying itself so that ultimately the moral subject also finds realization in its identification with reason.¹¹ Moreover, for Hegel, the ethical vocation of the individual can be carried out only within ever more general communities to which he belongs: the family, the civil society, and the state. When he is cut off from this context, which alone ties him to the universal, he falls back into a purely natural existence, that is, into his particularity, which is egotistical and therefore fundamentally amoral: "this relation and the recognition of it is, therefore, the individual's substantive duty, the duty to maintain this substantive individuality, i.e., the independence and sovereignty of the state, at the risk and the

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 263.

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 272-273. A reasonable interpretation of this issue can be found at: Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), 466-472.

¹¹ Stéphane Mosès, "From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War," 222-223.

sacrifice of property and life.”¹² The Hegelian deduction of ethics, in which the individual rises to ever-increasing generality, realizing himself finally in the renunciation of selfhood, defines him from the outset as a simple part of a whole.¹³ In other words, whereas human is insignificant in himself, a system alone confers meaning and dignity on him.

Now it is precisely the annulment of the self at the heart of the totality that, for Rosenzweig, destroys the very foundations of true ethics. In Rosenzweig’s view, ethics can only spring from radical freedom, an original possession of self by self. In the wake of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Rosenzweig subverts the Hegelian thesis of the end of philosophy from top to bottom. If everything has become philosophy, each individual should be able to begin philosophizing on his own. Concretely, “If God existed, how could I bear not to be God?” (SR, 18) Against the background of the historical philosophy of essence, it is this repossession of the subject by itself that the introduction to *the Star* comes to proclaim. It is the primordial autonomy of man as subject in his own right that Rosenzweig qualifies as “meta-ethical.” This meta-ethical dimension, as mentioned in the following chapters, is the original self-sufficiency of his self.

Whereas in Hegel it is in a speculative system that the ethical destination of man is accomplished, for Rosenzweig it can only be revealed beyond such a system. Against the horizon of a system for all-encompassing the particularity, Rosenzweig emphasizes the emergence of ethics is derived from the experience of the anguish of death. The forthcomingness of a death that strikes at random, far from lifting the individual above himself, casts him down upon the most elementary affirmation of his physical existence. In relation to that foundational experience, ethics only becomes possible again after the defense by the individual of his most personal existence (SR, 5). Such existence is his refusal to be caught up in the system of essence.

The fear of death and breaking up the All for the sake of the All

The fear of death

The text of *the Star* begins with philosophy and death. Death, and hence life, is the excluded other of philosophy. The “fear of death,” which is the flesh-and-blood human being’s response to the inescapability and presence of death as an unknowable and unwanted eventuality, is a powerful instance of “something” escaping thought and thereby undermining the wholeness constitutive of Parmenidean philosophy. Death refuses to become wholly a concept.

In fact, Rosenzweig justifies the need for a new thinking as follows: philosophy begins with “the fear of death.” Philosophy’s response to this fear was to restrict the application of the term “something” (Etwas) solely for ideal, conceptual, unchanging entities (SR, 4). Philosophy decided at its very beginning to treat death, not as something (Etwas) as something posited for reflection, but as a nothing (Nichts).¹⁴ Hence, it judged the individuals of the sensible world to be nothing. Hegel in particular called the domain of the objects of philosophy “Being” (Sein),

¹² G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 209.

¹³ Stéphane Mosès, “La Critique de la Totalité dans la Philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig,” *Les Études Philosophiques – Philosophie Allemande*, no. 3, (Juillet-Septembre 1976): 351-366, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20846846>.

¹⁴ In some particular cases, the writer refers to original German text at: Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg, 2002) [henceforth “*Der Stern*” in main text and “SE” in shortened notes].

and equated it with the “All” or totality. Hegel’s philosophy attempts to encompass all topics in philosophy. However, despite all the protests of Hegel and his followers to the contrary, Hegel’s synthesis of everything into a single whole failed to encompass what in reality is everything.

How does the denial of the fear of death lead philosophy to construct its reductive All? Rosenzweig understands the failure of the systems of German Idealism to lie precisely in their reduction of particular beings to nothing. He recounts this critique of Idealism in the opening pages of *the Star* but now offers a quasi-psychological explanation for Idealism’s reductive All, grounding its construction in Philosophy’s need to deny the fearfulness of death:

An All would not die, and in the All nothing would die. Only the individual can die, and all that is mortal is solitary. [...] “Idealism,” with its denial of all that separates the individual from the All is the tool with which philosophy works the stubborn material so long until it can no longer resist being wrapped in the fog of the One-and-All concept. If all were once spun into this fog, indeed death would be devoured, if not in the eternal victory, still in the one-and-universal night of the Nothing. And this is the last conclusion of this wisdom: death is – nothing. (SE, 5)¹⁵

According to Rosenzweig, philosophy pursues its grounding of individuals “in the All,” it identifies such individuals as mere parts of the architectonic structure of the system, in order to overcome the fearfulness of death. Since “only the individual can die,” Idealism seeks to deny “all that separates the individual from the All,” by denying the irreducible individuality of the individual revealed in death. Only by thus denying particularity as such can Idealism justify the conclusion that death itself is “nothing.”

The center of philosophical argument in Rosenzweig’s claim, that in reducing the individual to a mere part of the All, philosophy destroys death in the “one-and-universal night of the Nothing”. It reaches the conclusion that “death is – nothing” and it seems to parallel one of the central insights granted in the fear of death. Fear of death revealed to Rosenzweig how the individual’s being always stands in connection with her own “nothingness,” the way in which this boundedness to nothing is constitutive of the human being’s own finite being. By concluding that death is “nothing,” philosophy dismisses death as that which is not serious or not frightening, not essential or not worthy of reflection. It discards death as nothing at all. Actually, “for man does not really want to escape any kind of fetters; he wants to remain, he wants to-live. Philosophy, which commends death to him as its special protégé, as the magnificent opportunity to flee the straits of life, seems to him to be only mocking.” (SR, 3-4) However, in the fear of death, one experiences Nothing as that in whose hands one’s fate has been placed. Thus, one might well suggest that in the fear of death nothingness is experienced as a very real “something.” This is what Rosenzweig asserts. To Philosophy’s conclusion that “death is nothing,” Rosenzweig responds: “In truth this is no last conclusion, but rather a first beginning, and death is really not what it appears to be, not Nothing, but a merciless, irremovable Something.” (SR, 4)

¹⁵ The translation is mine. Generally, Hallo uses ancient English terms in his translation, e.g., “Aught” and “Nought”, for “Etwas” and “Nichts” in original German, respectively. See at: Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern*, 4. However, in some places, it seems that Hallo is confused in using the term “Nought” and “Nothing”. For example, in “Das Nichts ist nicht Nichts, es ist Etwas.” (SE, 5) he translates into “the Nought is not Nothing, it is Aught.” rather than “the Nothing is not Nothing, it is Something.” The writer has modified Hallo’s translation by “Something” and “Nothing” for the sake of consistency.

Furthermore, Rosenzweig does not simply deny the philosophical claim that “death is nothing,” but rather he denies the nothing of death “as conclusion”. The fact that death is nothing must be taken not “as conclusion” but rather as “first beginning,” as the source and object of serious questioning. Fear of death presents the starting point for the path to knowledge of the true All to those who recognize that “the Nothing of death is a Something, that each new Nothing-of-death is a new, ever newly fearful Something [...] The Nothing is not Nothing (nicht Nichts), it is Something. In the dark background of the world there stand as its inexhaustible presupposition a thousand deaths, instead of the one Nothing, which really would be Nothing, a thousand Nothings, which, just because they are many, are Something.” (SR, 5)

It leads to the fact that the Nothing of death is a Something not simply a real mortal threat to the individual, but precisely because it is individual, because it is manifold. Each death, and each fear of death belongs to the respective individual self whom it threatens. Rosenzweig seems to understand each individual being, here, as the site of interconnection between particular being and particular nothingness, an individualized interconnection revealed in death. But because philosophy closes its eyes to death and the fear of it, philosophy posits “one Nothing,” “the one-and-universal Nothing,” in place of the multiplicity of particular nothings revealed in the fear of death. It dismisses this manifold nothingness as “one-and-universal Nothing,” as that which Rosenzweig seems to understand along the lines of pure nonbeing, or total, empty nothingness. In the conceptual structure of *the Star*, the emergence of ethics from the experience of the anguish of death, that is, the rupture of the totality.¹⁶ As a result, to attain the “true All,” Rosenzweig suggests, one must begin with the true nothing; to understand the identity and difference of All that is, one must begin by comprehending the difference, the plurality inherent even to nothingness; one must comprehend the particular interconnection of particular being and particular nothingness that is revealed to the human being uniquely through her fear of her own death.¹⁷ In *the Star*, however, death serves not only to crack the face of Idealism but to get a foot in the door to life. And so, the writer argues that Rosenzweig’s does not merely break the All.

Breaking up the All for the sake of the All

According to Rosenzweig, the possibility of knowing the All depends on how one responds to these insights granted uniquely in the fear of death. It depends on whether one has the courage to “remain in the fear of death” (SR, 4), as Rosenzweig advocates, or whether one “denies these fears of the earthly” (SR, 3), as he claims philosophy does. But philosophy’s denial of the fear of death does not simply result in a lack of knowledge, for Rosenzweig. On the contrary, this denial leads philosophy to construct its own “All-notion” in place of the “true All.”

The “All” undergoes destruction and reconstruction in *the Star* which Rosenzweig refers to at times as the “All and One,” “One and All,” but most often simply as “the All,” designates precisely the systematic identity and difference of All that is. Indeed, that “all knowledge of the All begins in death, the fear of death,” (SR, 3) suggests that an Absolute standpoint that claims to overcome the limits of human finitude will not yield true knowledge of the All, but rather that only a proper recognition of the unique character of the individual mortal man holds the promise for systematic knowledge.

¹⁶ Stéphane Mosès, “From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War,” 225.

¹⁷ Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 134-135.

The Star itself is a “system of philosophy,” and as such it poses the question of the One and All – of how everything that is can and must be both a single unified totality and at once a vast multiplicity of unique particulars – in a comprehensive and original manner. Our purpose is to discern why Rosenzweig finds this systematic nature of the All to be so intimately intertwined with the particular position of man. Thus, the basic metaphysical insights and assumptions that guide and enable this systematic project will be explored (SR, 22-24). What makes it so difficult to keep in mind is that Rosenzweig does not always distinguish in name between the All he is tearing down and the All he is constructing.¹⁸

By and large, scholars have read the first introduction of *the Star* as an unequivocal attack on philosophy’s systematic quest to grasp the All. Hence, Richard Cohen writes of how Rosenzweig “counterposes the fact of death and the fear of death” against the “totalization effected by philosophical comprehension.” Stéphane Mosès claims that “the experience of death, which uncovers to us our irreducible reality as subjects, challenges the totalitarian pretension of philosophy.” And Emmanuel Levinas has most influentially declared “man’s mortality” to be the ground of Rosenzweig’s “challenge to the totality [...] Mortality is precisely the fact that everything cannot be settled, order cannot be restored [...] In me, totality shatters.”¹⁹ These scholars do point faithfully to *one side* of the argument about the All that Rosenzweig intends to set forth in the introduction to *the Star*, that is, the critical argument against the path to the All taken by the philosophical tradition that culminated in Hegel’s philosophy. But the problem with such one-sided readings of the opening of *the Star* is that they give no adequate explanation for why the same “All” that is supposed to have been deposed in the book’s opening but it repeats in the succeeded parts and even returns to its former state of glory at the book’s end.

These trends in Rosenzweig scholarship seem inadequate attempts to account for the coexistence in *the Star* of both the construction and deconstruction of system, of what appears to be the irreconcilability of the quest for and the critique of “the All.” Indeed, *the Star*’s opening declaration, “All knowledge of the All begins in death, the fear of death,” leads Rosenzweig into a scathing critique of Philosophy’s attempt to flee this true starting-point of knowledge of the All, a critique of Philosophy’s attempt to construct, in place of the “true All,” an “All” that would justify the denial of death and of the human fear of it. This critique undermines the traditional philosophical claim to the “All” to such an extent, it turns out, that it precipitates the breakup of what philosophy has taken to be the “All” into three separate elements – God, world, and man. Looking back upon this breakup, the last lines of *the Star*’s introduction remind the reader of the true purpose of the critical, deconstructive work of the introduction. Of the three pieces of the shattered All, Rosenzweig explains, we in fact know nothing. He thus declares, in these closing lines: “the Nothing of our knowledge is no single Nothing, but a three-fold Nothing. As such it contains within itself the promise of determinability. And for that reason, we may hope [...] to find again in [...] this threefold Nothing of knowledge, the All which we had to break up.” (SR, 22)

In a word, the breakup of the All in the introduction is no one-sided “critique of totality,” no attempt to rescue the individual man, who fears her own death, from the totalizing grasps of systematicity. Rather, the writer argues that the breakup of the All in the introduction to *the*

¹⁸ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 122.

¹⁹ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 70; Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 51; Emmanuel Levinas, “Foreword” to Stéphane Mosès, *op. cit.*, 19.

Star is carried out for the sake of the All itself. It is this breakup that offers “promise” and “hope” to that thinker who seeks to move past the illusive concept of the All that has dominated the philosophical tradition in order to attain the “true All.” As a result, while Rosenzweig shares with German Idealism the conviction that philosophy's role is to become a system, he advocates thinking of the system from a quintessentially human standpoint as one of three elements, along with God and the world.

1. The Particularity of Nothing as Rosenzweig's Alternative²⁰
2. Initial ideas about meta and metaethics²¹

Chapter 2: Three Irreducible Elements and the Ontological Analysis of Personality

*A fundamental method*²²

The starting point for a genuine appreciation of man

The Part I of *the Star*, therefore, desires to show nothing but the impossibility of tracing those three primary concepts back to each other. God, man, and world, they are – the one from eternity to eternity, the others since their creation – completely independent from one another and are connected only insofar as the one and eternal God created heaven and earth, revealed Himself to His likeness and will redeem both at the end of time. God, man, and world, they are not – properly speaking – quite different from what they seem in direct experience. They are, on the contrary, actually quite that which experience shows them to be: God and world and man, though distant yet connected, but not without a beginning in a creation.²³

God and World as irreducible elements

God in “A=A” as metaphysics

It is true that Moses Maimonides' negative theory of divine attributes gave Rosenzweig the initial Nothing of God with which his modern theology began. Whereas classical and medieval theology began with an affirmation of God and concluded with a negation, Rosenzweig begins with both negation and affirmation.

The logical symbol introduced to express this cognition of God is A=A. In A=A, the A on the left of the equation is divine freedom, and the A on the right is divine essence, both of which are God. Again, note that the relationship asserted is intransitive, so that while divine freedom becomes divine essence, divine essence does not become divine freedom. Classical theology had nowhere to go, because it began with God's essence.²⁴ Thus, in A=A, the A of the left-hand place is the point of departure. It is the *Nichts* of any knowledge of God from the conclusion of Maimonides theology. Rosenzweig calls it divine freedom because, lacking any content, it entails no limitation on God (SR, 28-30). In God's case, both “y” and “x” are “A.” By itself

²⁰ See at: Appendix 1.

²¹ See at: Appendix 2.

²² See at: Appendix 3.

²³ Karl Löwith, “M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* III, no. 1 (September 1942): 53-77, 64, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2103129>.

²⁴ Norbert M. Samuelson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 224 – 225.

“A” is the unknown content of God, which entails an infinite negative judgment of all that is not God (SR, 28).²⁵

The left-hand “A” is an act of affirmation of a negated essence. In more traditional terms, it is the act of negating of God everything that is finite. Conversely, the “= A” is an act of negating an infinite number of somethings any of which would limit God if they could be affirmed of Him, precisely because they are something (Etwas) (SR, 30-31). In other words, God is free because nothing can be affirmed of him. He is free from every limitation. He is infinitely free, because there are an infinite number of things that He is not; and He is eternally free, because nothing that will ever come to be will be God. Consequently, God as God is continuously not what He creates.²⁶

Next, the right-hand A is called divine essence (Wesen) (SR, 30-31). It is an asymptotic movement of divine freedom towards the idea of divine essence. Freedom is a force with a direction, whereas the essence simply is and therefore has no direction. Freedom is a potentiality, whereas an essence is an actuality. It is this movement that “A = A” expresses. God’s original infinite freedom becomes increasingly constrained and transformed into divine power and caprice, while the divine essence is transformed into divine fate and obligation. Through the endless passage of time in which an unceasing number of somethings are created, the more divine freedom (God as subject) becomes his essence (God is content). As such A = A is a statement that can be understood in terms of Cohen’s calculus. The sentence expresses an equation for the activity of creation, which, when diagrammed, has a particular nothing as its starting point and constantly approximates but never reaches an end point or limit that is 1.²⁷

In equation “A=A”, it is noticeable that it is God’s eternal motion from himself as an empty subject to himself as a full object. The origin is freedom, and the end is essence. God is that entity whose essence is not to be any entity. Thus, Rosenzweig’s new definition of God’s nature (although he calls it “the metaphysical”) is in fact a willful rejection of traditional metaphysics, from Parmenides to Hegel. Where traditional theology (in Rosenzweig’s somewhat misleading characterization) adores the notion that God is intelligible, Rosenzweig insists that “the metaphysical” names precisely that element in God’s nature which escapes cognition.²⁸

World in “B=A” as metalogic

Rosenzweig also points out that emphasizing the permanent essence of the world is impossible; rather, the essence needs to be penetrated. It is noticeable that logic, Hegel’s dialectic, for instance, deals with the world in general. In contrast, metalogic deals with the concrete lived world of individuals. Because it deals with the general, what logic expresses, it expresses as laws and affirmations of necessity. In contrast, because it deals with the individual, what metalogic expresses is contingent. Consequently, whereas logic can unify thought about reality,

²⁵ In particular, “A” is God or divine power, “A=” is God or divine freedom and “=A” is God or divine essence. See at: Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39.

²⁶ Norbert M. Samuelson, “The Concept of Nichts in Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption,” in *Reasoned Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 70.

²⁷ Norbert M. Samuelson, “The Concept of Nichts in Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption,” 72.

²⁸ Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 154.

it cannot unify reality. In fact, because its focus is solely on unification, it does not deal with reality at all. In contrast, metalogic deals with reality. That reality is its content, viz., creation.²⁹

Irreducibility is the negative presentation or assertion of the particular and unique sphere with which the system is concerned. With respect to the world, the core of metalogic is thus that “disconcerting fact about the world” that, after all, it is not spirit (SR, 45). While the emphasis here is clearly anti-Hegelian, Rosenzweig is nevertheless anxious to emphasize the uniqueness of the sphere of the world; it, as such, cannot be made to be related, let alone identified, with any other concept or sphere. Spirit is an example of a candidate for identification and also represents a historical philosophical system that posited the spirit of the world.³⁰ Thus, Rosenzweig uses the notion of the *meta*, which is meant to negate that philosophical or systematic trend. This is expressed by Rosenzweig when he says that metalogical refers to something that has its own basis and base, is inspired with its own spirit, and is brilliant with its own splendor (SR, 61).

Rosenzweig’s equation for the world is “B = A” (SE, 54). B (Besondere) is a total distinctiveness that constitutes the complete, absolute individuality of everything that becomes real in the world. It is the act of negation of the *Nichts* of the world which, when conjoined to God’s act of affirmation, God’s Physis, gives rise to each individual something (Etwas) (SR, 46-50). God’s Physis is expressed in the equation of the world as A (Allgemeine). In this logical syntax, the equal sign expresses their conjunction (das Und). The individuals of the world are produced by an endless process of interaction between the particular (Besondere) and the universal (Allgemeine). Each side of the equation is incomplete without the other. The universal is passive. It simply is, and as such it needs application. This need generates a force of attraction upon the particular, which, because it is aimless, is drawn to the universal.³¹

In the process that is the world, such equation “B = A” expresses the process of life. B is the content of the world that includes every particular as particular. A is the passive form of the world that includes every form and order of the world as form and order. The equal sign expresses a non-reversible relation between A and B in which B is continuously attracted to “A”. “B = A” states that B penetrates and fills A. In Rosenzweig’s language, the world is expressed as “B = A,” which means that what is a B is attracted to what is an A (SR, 47-48). In the equation “B = A,” as each nothing becomes a something, it becomes an individual. The world is constituted by an endless stream of these nothings becoming something. The something towards which they move is universal (Allgemeine). It is each particular individual as it becomes universal that defines the world.³²

In summary, we could sketch some crucial points concerning world as metalogic in connection to God and, to some extent, man (as personality). For Rosenzweig, it is obvious that world has its own position which cannot be reduced into any essence. Particularly, in the logical symbol introduced to express this cognition of the world is B=A, the connective “=” expresses penetration, which is an intransitive relation. B strives to penetrate A, but A does not strive to penetrate B. A is world-spirit or logos, and B is the individual, particular instance within the

²⁹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption* (London: Routledge, 1999), 40.

³⁰ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 72.

³¹ Norbert M. Samuelson, “The Concept of Nichts in Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption,” 74.

³² Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 46-47.

plenitude. $B=A$ expresses the life of the isolated individual, whose life is the project of penetrating its universality (world-spirit or logos).³³ $B=A$ also expresses that the content of the world is that which is becoming the form of the world, that the particular is becoming universal, and ultimately what is active seeks to become passive. Also, $=A$ is the divine essence. Hence, $B=A$ states that the world as a plenitude of sensate individuals is alive with an end to penetrate the essence of God.³⁴

In short, after analyzing Rosenzweig's arguments, God and world appear clearly as irreducible elements, i.e., they cannot be reduced into any system of essences. Rosenzweig continues his analysis by proposing two distinct views of man.

Man as an independent element alongside God and the world

Rosenzweig argues that there are two distinct views of man: a world-view (*Weltanschauung*) or a life-view (*Lebensschauung*). The *Nichts* of knowledge of man marks the transcendence of ethics and the beginning of metaethics (SE, 12).

This is intended to make the analysis clearer and to broaden perspectives in ethics and metaethics. Ethics deals with world-view (*Weltanschauung*). It concentrates on human actions expressed in the formation of commands, and its subject matter is a view of man in general. From an ethical perspective, the man is primarily an autonomous, self-governing agent. For instance, Kant takes this perspective as far as it can go. In contrast, metaethics deals with life-view (*Lebensanschauung*). It concentrates on man as something that is passive, who receives rather than initiates commands, and its subject matter is a view of man as an individual.

The first stage: personality

Personality as over-attachment to the world

In Rosenzweig's description of the human as an ongoing act, from birth to death, of unfulfilled desire, he uses three terms distinctly (although not exclusively) about the man. The terms are personality (*Persönlichkeit*), self (*Selbst*), and finally soul (*Seele*).

Personality defines mans insofar as they are identical with their body, that is, as physical things among physical things in the world. Its opposite is the self, which is what mans are not by the definition of the physical world but solely by their internal definition. It is, in other words, what persons are, not to others but to themselves. Finally, a soul is what humans are not only to themselves and not only what they are to others, but what they are or are becoming as they are in reality – a particular kind of movement in relation to the creating motion of God and the being created movement of the created world. Note that for Rosenzweig, a soul is not something mental that stands in opposition to some physical body. Rather, man, so less than God and world, is a single movement defined by progress from an origin to an end. The definition of the movement defines the man from original consciousness in birth to final consciousness in death, and it is this definition that is the soul (SR, 79).

Rosenzweig also begins his descriptions with everyday life. It is not a matter of treating oneself as an entity among entities, of failing to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic being. Hence, he calls the everyday self the personality (*die Persönlichkeit*). He indicates that “personality is man playing the role assigned to him by fate, one role among many in the

³³ It can be said that in medieval terms the particularity of the individual is its matter, and its universality is its form (the writer's note).

³⁴ Norbert M. Samuelson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, 226 – 227.

polyphonic symphony of mankind. It is indeed the “greatest gift of mortal men,” of every last one of them.” (SR, 68) On the contrary, “self has no relation to the children of men, only and always to one individual man, in short to the self.” (Ibid.) In other words, the self as “personality” is determined superficially by social roles and lacks an inner relation to its own death.³⁵

The inadequacy of selfhood qua personality comes from over-attachment to the world. The personality is content to wear the masks of the world, to play a role on the world’s stage, to be projected out into the world, dispersed in it, to take up one or all names in history.³⁶ Thus, personality, like the world and the objects within the world, is expressed by the equation, “B=A”.

Personality as an inauthentic self

First of all, Rosenzweig understands that personality is abstracted and comparable. “The singular “personality” is only an abstraction which draws its life from the plural “personalities.” Personality is always one among many; it may be compared.” (SR, 68) “As the origin of the term already implies, personality is man playing the role assigned to him by fate, one role among many in the polyphonic symphony of mankind. It is indeed the “greatest gift of mortal men, of every last one of them.” (Ibid.) The singular “personality” is only an abstraction which draws its life from the plural “personalities.” In short, personality is always one among many; it may be compared.

Next, personality is personality by virtue of its firm interconnection with a definite individuality (SR, 72). Many predications are possible about personality, as many as about individuality. As individual predications, they all follow the scheme B=A, the scheme in which all the predications about the world and its parts are conceptualized. Personality is always defined as an individual in its relation to other individuals and to a Universal (Allgemeine).

For Rosenzweig, the shattering of the everydayness of personality means a new appreciation for the significance of death. The ownmost character of death, that one dies one’s own death, that no one can die anyone else’s death, does not open the self up to its ecstatic relationship with (and of) being, but rather closes the self more firmly upon itself, ties the knot of selfhood tighter, seals the self more hermetically, and thus breaks with the apelike role-playing of personality.³⁷ What the self’s fear of death does, according to Rosenzweig, is open the self up to the givenness and unalterability of its worldly nature.

As will be mentioned, what the personality faces in facing death is what Rosenzweig names its “character” (der Charakter), its ownmost non-relational selfhood, which is so isolated from history that for all intents and purposes it is timeless. Furthermore, since Rosenzweig usually clarifies the term “personality” in comparison with “character” or “self”, the definition regarding personality as mentioned above is just brief and initial. Analyzing authentic self should help to draw a new perspective for both terms “personality” and “self”. “The self is solitary man in the hardest sense of the word: the personality is the political animal.” (SR, 71), as we might recognize.

³⁵ The correspondence to Heidegger’s undifferentiating everyday self could be recognized (the writer’s note).

³⁶ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 50.

³⁷ It could be recognized that the significance of death as Rosenzweig conceives it is quite different from that appreciated in Dasein’s being-toward-death (the writer’s note).

Chapter 3: The Ontological Analysis of an Authentic Self

The second stage: character – an authentic self

Character as rooted in human idiosyncrasy

What Rosenzweig wanted to prove is that man's individual being is not subject to proof. In this sense, the position of man is parallel to that of the position of the world and of God (SR, 63). What he wanted to show is that knowledge cannot be the instrument or bridge for proving the reality and the primary essence of those self-enclosed spheres of reality. Once knowledge attempts that, it necessarily loses itself in the Nothing (Ibid.); it loses its very legitimacy because it attempts to refer to a sphere of reality and by the same token loses that sphere from its horizon.³⁸ Hence, Rosenzweig also tries to find a way to establish man's irreducibility, and according to his basic methodological approach, this can only be done, as it were, from within. He takes several steps in that direction, which are eventually summed up in what is to be seen as metaethics in his particular or peculiar sense.

In general, the human idiosyncrasy (*menschliche Eigenheit*) attained its own figure as the "self [that] is quintessentially closed in itself" and at once "finite" (SR, 66), through the factual unification of its "character," that is, its "being in the particular" (SR, 64) and the defiant pride of free will. In that it is thus closed in itself, in that it has its being in its own particularity, it is self-grounded in a way that the particulars of the elemental world are not. As such, the elemental self could claim to be "single and nevertheless All" (Ibid.) This particularity becomes evident when Rosenzweig contrasts such human freedom with the divine freedom. "Human freedom is finite, but [...] unconditional" (SR, 66), and it leads to Rosenzweig's analysis of self as metaethics.

Human idiosyncrasy and emphatic particularity

Rosenzweig has already shown that the negative thinking that characterizes the new thinking takes two forms. One is the affirmation of the negation of a nothing, and the other is a not Nothing (*nicht Nichts*). These two forms of thinking come together in non-standard (to traditional philosophy) propositions whose symbolic form is " $y = x$ ". The right-hand term asserts the affirmation (Ja), while the left-hand term asserts the negation (Nein). The " $=$ " conjoins the two assertions as a movement from an origin towards an end. Rosenzweig now applies this new logic to the element, the man, and begins with its left-hand expression (the simple negation), which turns out to be human idiosyncrasy (*menschliche Eigenheit*) – the peculiar, unique, distinctive property of the man (SE, 68).

Still, man also is a creature, and to that extent, Rosenzweig's analysis of man is also part of his doctrine of creation. As Maimonides' negative theology introduced doubt about God into medieval philosophical physics, and Descartes' Meditations introduced doubt about the world into seventeenth-century philosophical logic, so Kant's transcendental Unity of Apperception introduced doubt about man into modern ethics. As initial doubt about God in metaphysics led to the affirmation of the creation of God's nature, and initial doubt about the world in metalogic led to the negation of the generation of the distinctive particular, and these two directions in thought were conjoined (Und) through the structure of the individual, so now Rosenzweig moves in metaethics from an initial doubt about man to a new expression in algebraic symbols that entails the unspoken source-words – "yes" (Ja), "no" (Nein) and "and" (Und).³⁹

³⁸ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 74-75.

³⁹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 47-48.

From Kant's analysis of the self as the Transcendental Unity of Apperception, Rosenzweig argues that man's essence is given as a contentless but still affirmed precondition for all knowledge. In every act of knowing, man knows himself as something there (da). However, at the same time, man knows that "what he is" is distinct (Besondere) from the very act through which this essence is revealed. He knows himself as that unique nothing that is the focal point of the world. As such man is so distinctive (Besondere) that he can recognize no other particular but himself. This radical distinctiveness (Besonderheit) is his essence. Rosenzweig calls this peculiarity the source-affirmation (Urja) of man. It is his idiosyncrasy or peculiarity (Eigenheit): "his first word, his original Yes, affirms his peculiarity. In the boundless No of his nothing, this affirmation founds his distinctiveness, idiosyncrasy as his essence."⁴⁰ Its symbol is "B" (SE, 70).

It is undeniable that the B of man's limited being – his positively affirmed peculiarity and distinctiveness – is related as the direct contrary of the A of God's infinite being. It also exhibits the relation between man and the world, for it is what their respective expressions share in common. In the case of the world, as the affirmed left-hand term, B is the negative subject that is the world's distinctive singularity. However, in the case of man, who also initially is a created object, the term also is the right-hand symbol which, as such, expresses the affirmative predicate that defines man's permanent character (SR, 65). Basically, Rosenzweig carefully analyzes two crucial steps to illustrate the man's peculiarity or idiosyncrasy (die Eigenheit).

Rosenzweig's first step in establishing the fundamental position of man is to note the basic relationship appertaining to man and what he calls "existence in the distinctive or particular (Besonderen)" (SE, 68). We may come closer to the meaning of Rosenzweig's phrase by trying to understand it as denoting being in its uniqueness, as that which cannot be encompassed by any general or universal context. That uniqueness or particularity is related to man's ephemerality.⁴¹ Concretely, "man is ephemeral (vergänglich), his essence is to be ephemeral as it is the essence of God to be immortal and unconditional, or of the world to be universal and necessary. The existence of God is an existence in the unconditional, the existence of the world is an existence in the universal, the existence of man is existence in the particular."⁴² In addition, knowledge is above the human as it is below God and about or in the world. In other words, human knowledge is about the world, not about either the human or the divine, since (in Kant's terms) both stand outside of the domain of the knowable, God as the thing-in-itself and man as the Transcendental Unity of Apperception (i.e., as the subject that knows the object of knowledge, who, as pure subject, can never be an object).⁴³ In a word, "I am still there to all knowledge [...] and his first word, his primeval Yea, affirms his peculiarity." (SR, 64) This affirmation thus affirms his emphatic particularity, distinctiveness, or, in short, his idiosyncrasy.

Furthermore, the man who remains hidden and who is inaccessible to our knowledge and Rosenzweig discovered this introverted man, relating only to itself, an authentic being.⁴⁴ Such

⁴⁰ The translation is mine. "Sein erstes Wort, sein Urja, bejaht sein Eigensein. Im grenzenlosen Nicht seines Nichts gründet diese Bejahung sein Besonderes, sein Eigenes als sein Wesen." (SE, 69)

⁴¹ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 75.

⁴² The translation is mine. "Der Mensch ist vergänglich, Vergänglichsein ist sein Wesen, wie es das Wesen Gottes ist, unsterblich und unbedingt, das Wesen der Welt, allgemein und notwendig zu sein. Gottes Sein ist Sein in Unbedingten, der Welt Sein Sein im Allgemeinen, des Menschen Sein ist: Sein im Besonderen." (SE, 68-69) It seems that Rosenzweig's term "Besonderen" could be translated into "distinctive" or "particular". E. Galli (2005) also uses the term "particular" (the writer's note).

⁴³ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User's Guide to Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption*, 89.

⁴⁴ Moreover, the possibility of a pure construction of this human has important consequences for the later, relational human who responds to an other (the writer's note).

a construction is based on a different cause of unknowability: the man is ephemeral. The final blow to the all that philosophy tried to know was the deaths of specific people, and those deaths are now made the hallmark of the man. Human nature, which reason cannot know, is particularity, a particularity that is neither universal nor eternal, but the particularity of the individual. Rosenzweig distinguishes this from the particular subordinate to its class and emphasizes that the human essence is an individual essence, the ownmost essence of each, neither shared nor susceptible to rational deduction. In fact, “this peculiarity (Eigenheit) is not part of a community or species essence. It is alone.”⁴⁵ In this sense, it seems that the system of essence in Hegel philosophy becomes invalid. Rosenzweig emphasizes “this idiosyncrasy of man is therefore something different from the individuality which he assumes as individual phenomenon within the world. It is not an individuality which sets itself apart from other individualities.” (SR, 64) In addition, existence in particularity apparently bears on inherent relation to the ephemerality of that particularity as exemplified by its death, because death is an occurrence related by definition to the single individual and cannot be understood in its dimension as being of a general or universal character.⁴⁶

It is clear, therefore, that in his analysis, Rosenzweig tries to deal not with the characteristic features of the human race or of mankind, but with the position of the individual *qua* individual.⁴⁷ His approach takes a view different from the anthropological trends that stress human historicity, human linguistic capacity, the human’s distinctive upright posture, and, finally, human essence. The significance of that shift to the individual as such will become a vital issue in a subsequent part of our analysis.

Rosenzweig’s attempt starts with the position of the emphatic particularity and leads to a second step. Negatively speaking, man *qua* an emphatic particularity or particular individual cannot be seen as belonging to a universal sphere, of which by definition he is not a part. The self-enclosed character of man as an individual is expressed both negatively and positively in the statement that man is individual and nevertheless universal, both finite and infinite:

This idiosyncrasy of man is therefore something different from the individuality which he assumes as individual phenomenon within the world. It is not an individuality that separates itself from other individualities, it is not a part - and the individual confesses, precisely by insisting on his indivisibility, that it is itself a part. Although it is not infinite itself, it is “in” infinity; it is individual and yet universal. The infinite silence of human not-nothing around it; it is itself the tone that rings out in this silence, something finite and yet limitless.⁴⁸

In a word, “peculiarity (Eigenheit) as something distinctive can only be designated by B. We have been unable to ascertain an aim in it. It is just as aimless.” (SE, 70) Rosenzweig proves that there is no relationship between =A and B in case of man. Man is not in contrast; rather, it is wholly separate from world. What expresses the relationship between the world and the human is exclusively the symbol, B. In the case of the world, B is the affirmation (Ja) which expresses the world’s individuality (Individualität) as particularity (Besonderheit). Conversely,

⁴⁵ Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 53.

⁴⁶ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 75.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76 (emphases added).

⁴⁸ The translation is mine. “Diese Eigenheit des Menschen ist also etwas anderes als die Individualität, die er als einzelne Erscheinung innerhalb der Welt annimmt. Sie ist keine Individualität, die sich gegen andre Individualitäten abscheidet, sie ist kein Teil – und das Individuum bekennt, grade indem es auf seine Unteilbarkeit pocht, daß es selber Teil ist. Sie ist eben zwar nicht selbst unendlich, aber „im“ Unendlichen; sie ist Einzelnes und dennoch Alles. Um sie herum liegt die unendliche Stille des menschlichen Nicht-nichts; sie selber ist der Ton, der in diese Stille tönt, ein Endliches und doch Grenzenloses.” (SE, 69)

the right-hand B of the human equation is the negation that expresses the human's permanent character. Furthermore, "the man is a distinct nothing that wants to become its own distinct man something, unlike anything else, including the divine. In the case of the man, this B expresses his negation, i.e., the unique character that he wishes (but never is fully able) to be within the world."⁴⁹ How can Rosenzweig continue the analysis of man as inward-directed, whereas peculiarity (idiosyncrasy) is directionless? The key is his analysis of human will.

Free will and defiant will

Rosenzweig seeks to expose the ontological position of the human individual from several additional perspectives. According to the programmatic point of departure, the human individual has to be seen from within, as a being that cannot be immersed in a totality outside itself. This comes to the forefront in Rosenzweig's attempts to characterize human will or freedom. The axis of this analysis is the notion of finitude.⁵⁰ The finitude of man is not only due to the death that awaits him, but also to the nature of his freedom, which is freedom to will and not, like that of God, freedom to act.⁵¹

The affirmation that is achieved through a not Nothing (nicht Nichts) of man is his finite freedom to will. Man differs from other creatures in that he, like God, can will, and he differs from God in that his will, unlike God's, has limited power (SR, 66). Hence, the left-hand expression of the equation for man is "B =", which expresses human free will. Rosenzweig emphasizes that free will (B=) has direction (SR, 67). "This free will is finite and momentary in its manifestations, as is the fullness of worldly phenomena. But in contrast to the latter, it is not simply satisfied with its existence; it knows another law than that of its own gravity. It does not fall headlong: it has direction. Therefore, its symbol is a B on the left side of the equation, as in the case of the fullness of phenomena, but by way of differentiation, a B= not as simple B." (SR, 67) It is a purely intentional, directional act that in itself is nothing because it lacks content. It is similar in form but opposite with respect to God to the "A =" of metaphysics. Whereas God's freedom is his overt action, man's freedom is only will. In other words, whereas in God's case what he wills is what he does, in man's case the two are separate. Hence, in God's case, the freedom to will is also a freedom to act that entails infinite power, whereas in man's case there is no such entailment. While man is free to will, he is not free to act. While man has some power, that power is limited radically by the world in which he lives (SR, 67).

Human freedom, which composes the other part of this construction, is markedly different from divine freedom. Because all freedom is negation, freedom is in some sense always finite. Human freedom is further finite because it is marked by finite power. God has free power; humans have free will – they cannot always do what they want, but they can want whatever they will (SR, 66). Human will, like divine will, serves to make a person unknowable by negating (in will, if not in fact) any claim to know the human. In other words, the finiteness of human freedom is inherent in freedom itself because that freedom is freedom of will⁵² and not like the freedom of God, that is freedom of action. It is free will in the strict sense of the term, but not free power: Human freedom in contrast to divine freedom is denied capability in its very origin, but its will is as unconditional, as boundless, as the capacity of God (SR, 66).

⁴⁹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User's Guide to Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption*, 90.

⁵⁰ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 76. Besides, finitude is what Rosenzweig calls "ephemerality", see at: Norbert M. Samuelson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, 261.

⁵¹ Salomon Malka ed., *Le Dictionnaire Franz Rosenzweig: Une étoile dans le siècle* (Paris: Les Édition du Cerf, 2016), 191.

⁵² In Hallo's translation, he translates "der Wille" into "volition" (the writer's note).

Human freedom is thus unconditional and finite all at once. The man can will unconditionally, but his freedom is inherently limited in the realization of this will. One might suggest that the coupling of unconditionality and finitude in the freedom of the self makes for an uneasy marriage.⁵³ To will unconditionally, but to remain wholly limited with respect to the realization of what is willed, marks an internal conflict within the elemental self which it cannot resolve closed up within itself. This inner conflict will only find its resolution, we shall find, when the self opens up that unconditional but finite freedom in relation to its others.⁵⁴

It seems that the construction parallels to the construction of God: the human essence is finite, but unique and unpredictable and similarly irreducible, while human freedom provides a contrariness that refuses classification. Both parts, moreover, are also parallel in their relation to the nothingness of knowledge of the human: the essence is a location of a neighborhood of ignorance around the idiosyncratic, unknown essence. The freedom is the negation of the ignorance that protects it from further attempts to pin it down. Rosenzweig represents these by the symbols “B” (for human essence) and “B =” (human free will).⁵⁵ However, “we seek the living man, the self” (SR, 67), but how will human will (with its direction and no content) enter on the path to living man? Rosenzweig continues his analysis with the term “defiant will”.

It is useful to quote at some length what Rosenzweig says about the context into which the concept of defiance is introduced. The finite being wants nothing other than what it is: it wants its own essence, and here Rosenzweig adds, like God’s freedom.

But this own essence that it wants is a finite essence [...] Still entirely within its own realm, then, but already sighting its objects from afar, free will recognizes itself in its finiteness without, however, in the least surrendering any of its unconditionality. At this point, still entirely unconditional and yet already conscious of its finiteness, it changes from free will to defiant will. Defiance, the proud withal, is to man what power, the lofty; thus is to God. The claim of defiance is as sovereign as the privilege of power. The abstraction of free will takes shape as defiance. (SR, 67-68)

In summary, this recognition that his will is limited makes his free will defiant.⁵⁶ It expresses a direction but not content, and as such, it is defiant will.

Character as a self-enclosure

It is this defiant will that takes on content or determination (Bestimmung) as character. These determinations are the affirmative content of his idiosyncrasy (Eigenheit). Its symbol is also “B”. Of course, it occupies the right-hand side of our equation. “Defiance still remains thoroughly preserved as defiance. It finds its content here, its determination, not its termination. Defiance remains defiance, it remains unconditional in form, but it takes character for its content; defiance defies all with character.” (SR, 68) In a word, “this is the self-consciousness of man or, putting it more briefly, his self” (SR, 68) as will be mentioned next.

⁵³ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 76-77: “According to Rosenzweig, the finiteness of human freedom is inherent in freedom itself because that freedom is freedom of volition and not – like the freedom of God – freedom of action. [...] *There is a rift in his existence*. His freedom as the freedom of will may be boundless, but the execution of that freedom is limited.” (Emphases added).

⁵⁴ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 192.

⁵⁵ Robert Gibbs, *op. cit.*, 53.

⁵⁶ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 49.

What the personality faces in facing death is what Rosenzweig names its “character” (Charakter), its ownmost non-relational selfhood, which is so isolated from history that for all intents and purposes it is timeless (SE, 71). As character, the knot of selfhood is tied as tight as possible, down to an unalterable nugget of ownmost being. What the personality encounters in its character is the givenness of created being, isolated, alone, individual, creaturely being: not creating, not free, but created, given.⁵⁷ The character represents that inalienable, unalterable hard core or nugget of selfhood impervious to history. It is that which is given, or created, and not made.⁵⁸

In this notion Rosenzweig contests the idea that selfhood is fully constituted by exterior relations, or that the self is infinitely malleable in the manner proposed by “existentialist” philosophers. Obviously, Rosenzweig cannot “prove” or “derive” this claim, because if he could it would at the same time be proven false. The givenness of character is simply given, breaking the individual’s tie to “humanity,” “ethics,” and other universals or substitutes for universals. Rosenzweig can only acknowledge it. This, as Nathan Rotenstreich has pointed out so clearly, is precisely the sense of the “meta” of Rosenzweig’s “metaethical” account of man: one must begin grasping the self outside of ethics.⁵⁹

For Rosenzweig, the more authentic individuality (the character), unlike the less authentic one (personality), is intimately related to death. Besides conceptual representations of death, the only “death” personality knows is metaphorical, its own collapse in having to give way to the truer self, character. Character, on the other hand, is moved by fear of death, real death, death as terminus. Indeed, it is precisely the self as character, the unique self, its interiority, that dies and is forever lost at life’s end. The attributes which make up personality, in contrast, have no essential relation to death. Character, furthermore, is the original unalterable core of an individual, the ownness and inalienability of the self. “There is no greater solitude,” Rosenzweig writes, “than in the eyes of a dying man, and no more defiant, proud isolation than that which appears on the frozen countenance of the deceased” (SR, 72).⁶⁰ Consequently, character is non-relational. It is non-relational because it is a self-relationship, a self-enclosure. Character, in short, is inward-directed and centripetal.

The third stage: metaethics and beyond

Self (B=B) as inward-directed

Rosenzweig briefly describes the procedure from free will to self. “Free will become defiant will, and the defiance of will coagulates with character to shape the self.” (SR, 69). Indeed, the defiant will (B=) is conjoined (Und) to the character (B) as the self. It is the product of free will taking on content that transforms that will into a living man (lebendige Mensch). In Rosenzweig’s term: “the self” is what originates in this encroachment by free will upon peculiarity as the conjunction (Und) of defiance and character.” (SR, 68) The finished equation (B=B), therefore, designates a pure self-containedness together with an equally pure finiteness. The self is utterly self-contained, owing to its being rooted in character. In other words, only

⁵⁷ It seems that “fear of death” (SR, 3) breaks the self of its representational self-deceptions, as with Heidegger, but not for the sake of a deeper engagement in the ecstasies of historical being (the writer’s note).

⁵⁸ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 51.

⁵⁹ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 82-83.

⁶⁰ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 57.

the unification of human character and the defiance of human will yields the figure of the human “self” out of the human being’s own nothing.⁶¹

Furthermore, it is significant that the attraction toward the essence of this freedom brings together freedom and essence and produces the self. The self emerges as human freedom becomes defiance and human essence becomes character. This self “wills nothing else except that which he is,” and “what the self is” is a finite being – a being that has an end in death (SR, 68). To become a self, a man must learn to will to be itself, and by so doing, to cease to will according to the world and its categories. The self, in contrast to the personality, does not belong to groups, communities, people, nations, and so on, but roots itself in its own being. Thus, the task of becoming a self is a task of breaking with the world, not in physical withdrawal, but in focusing the will solely on one’s own being, which is a finite being, a being with character.⁶²

Rosenzweig emphasizes the uniqueness of the self. “Self has no relation to the children of men, only and always to one individual man, in short, to the self. But there is no plural of self. [...] The self is not a part, not a type case, nor a zealously guarded portion of the commonweal which it might be meritorious to give up. [...] It is alone; it is none of the children of men; it is Adam, Man himself.” (SR, 68) The self as inward-directed will be clarified in comparison with personality and God. Here, the inward-directed self could be further clarified in comparison with personality in “B=A” and even with God in “A=A”.

First of all, “B = B” as the expression of man as a self is logically comparable to the equation “B = A” of the world. In both cases, the right-hand term defines and develops, but at the same time limits, the possibilities, i.e., the freedom of the left-hand term. In both cases, the left-hand term is something distinctive (Besondere). The difference is that in the case of the world, what the particular becomes is a universal (Allgemeine), while in the case of man, the particular becomes character. The difference is significant. Unlike “B = A,” “B = B” expresses the self as non-relational. The self becomes itself independent of any relation to another self or a universal. In contrast, man’s personality is something in the world. It is defined by its relationship to its species and its individual members.

In contrast to personality in “B=A”, “there are no derivative predications about self, only the one, original B=B.” (SR, 69) “Self,” unlike “personality,” is not a relational term. As its equation exhibits, the self is a self-contained uniqueness of the particular. It is not, like personality, a qualified affirmation of distinctiveness in relation to other human beings. In other words, man is both within and without the world. Insofar as he stands outside, he, like the creator, is defined by his will as a self, and insofar as he stands within, he, like any other creature, is defined by what he does in relation to every other member of his species.⁶³ (SR, 68)

Rosenzweig also underlines “the self is solitary man in the hardest sense of the word.” (SR, 71) In contrast, he continues, “the personality is the political animal” (SR, 71). Taking up Rosenzweig’s allusion to Aristotle’s characterization of the man as a political animal, Rosenzweig’s shift from personality to character means a break with the political altogether. Character is the self inwardly turned, feeding on its own resources, on its own nature, the unique self. “The self,” Rosenzweig writes, “lacks all bridges and connections; it is turned in upon

⁶¹ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 160. Noticeably, Rosenzweig often simply calls character as “self” (Selbst) (SE, 78).

⁶² Robert Gibbs, *op. cit.*, 53-54.

⁶³ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 50.

itself exclusively” (SR, 78).⁶⁴ The self is thus irreducible into any systems of definition or essence.

Secondly, the equation for man as a self, to some extent, is more like the equation for God. Both “ $B = B$,” (free will having become character) and “ $A = A$,” (divine freedom having become divine essence), express self-contained elements. The sole difference is that “Adam is really exactly ‘like God,’ only unadulterated finiteness where God is unadulterated infinity.” (SR, 69)⁶⁵ Concretely, Rosenzweig states “self symbolized by the equation $B=B$, takes its stand directly opposite God” (SR, 69). It recalls the emphasis of Nietzsche as Rosenzweig quoted at the beginning of *the Star*.

As mentioned, the man as a self, i.e., as “ $B = B$ ”, is free will having become character. As such it is both finite and self-contained, in contrast to God, who, as “ $A = A$ ” (i.e., divine freedom having become divine essence), is self-contained but infinite. However, Rosenzweig’s emphasis in this paragraph is more on how the elemental man is distinct from the elemental world than from the divine element. The distinction that he intends to clarify is that between every man as a physical, corporeally-defined entity and that same being as a spiritual, mentally-defined entity. In this respect, “personality” relates to the man as something physical within the world of objects, while “self” characterizes this same element as something external to the world. Personality also, like the world and the objects within it, is expressed by the equation, “ $B = A$ ”, whereas as “ $B = B$ ”, an equation (like the divine “ $A = A$ ”) expresses something (the self) that has no relations beyond itself.”⁶⁶

Self ($B=B$) as metaethics

Rosenzweig not only makes a clear distinction between personality and self (as metaethics) but also the actual root of self. And Rosenzweig even emphasizes that it is internally contradictory (SR, 70). The movement between the poles of individuality and personality, and the other is the movement from character to self, could be recognized.

First, each set has a different origin. Every human being is born with individuality as a biological feature of the physical world. As such, the human completes himself when he develops a personality, and, through physical love, generates a new individuality. “The birthday of the self is not the same as the birthday of the personality. For the self, the character, too, has its birthday: one day it is there. It is not true that character “becomes,” that it “forms.” One day the self assaults man like an armed man and takes possession of all the wealth in his property. This day is always a definite day, even if man no longer knows it.” (SR, 71) However, character is not present at birth, and what character becomes, viz., the self, does not occur until “old age”, by which Rosenzweig means death (*Thanatos* in Greek), viz., the point in time beyond which the character of the individual human is beyond any regeneration.

Second, each set has a different end. Whereas personality is a political animal, the self is and remains solitary (SR, 71). When Aristotle defines the human as a political animal, i.e., as someone relational to the world, he is thinking only of human personality. But this definition ignores that the human also is a self, solitary man, non-relational.

⁶⁴ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 56.

⁶⁵ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 50.

⁶⁶ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption*, 93. Noticeably, in part Rosenzweig’s distinction can be understood as similar to Buber’s two-fold definition of human consciousness as “Ich-Du” and “Ich-Es”. Although this is only an analogy (not an identity), this issue goes beyond the scope of this paper (the writer’s note).

Third, personality is defined by character, which is definite or determinate individuality. However, the self, while it has character, is not defined by it. “True, *ethos* is content for this self and the self is the character. But it is not defined by this its content; it is not self by virtue of the fact that it is this particular character. Rather it is already self by virtue of the fact that it has a character, any character, at all. Thus, personality is personality by virtue of its firm interconnection with a definite individuality, but the self is self merely by its holding fast to its character at all. In other words, the self “has” its character.” (SR, 72) The equation “ $B = A$ ” expresses human personality in the sense that the subject is an individuality that becomes defined through life by taking on sets of characteristics that define his personality. In Aristotelian terms, predication changes the initial, subject particularity into something else than particularity. On the other hand, the equation that expresses the self is “ $B = B$ ”. Here the right hand term does not determine the left hand term to be anything else than what he to begin with. In Rosenzweig’s words, the distinctive particular (B, for *Besondere*) of the initial will does not become anything other than what it already is in the distinctive particular (B) of character. Obviously, this analysis has important consequences for our understanding of the human ontologically which Rosenzweig discusses in his idea regarding metaethics. It is not only denying any kind of ambitions to enframe man into essences but also emphasizes the non-definitive dimension of human character, in this case, self.

The consequence of this analysis of the human is that Rosenzweig reaches from his description is that the world of ethical considerations is inherent in the self itself or the self is metaethics.

All this is for the self only something which it possesses, not the very air of existence which it breathes. It does not, like personality, live in it. The only atmosphere of its existence is-itself. The whole world, and in particular the whole moral world, lies in back of it; it is “beyond it,” not in the sense of not needing it, but of not recognizing the laws of this world as its laws. It recognizes them merely as presuppositions that belong to it without its having to obey them in return. For the self, the world of ethics is merely its *ethos*; nothing more is left of it. The self does not live in a moral world: it has its *ethos*. The self is metaethical. (SR, 73)

This statement makes it clear why and in what sense Rosenzweig used the term metaethics. Since there is no primary relationship between the self-enclosed self and the ethical realm, the self, not being immersed in the ethical realm, is conceived as metaethical, in a mode analogous to the employment of the terms metaphysical and metalogical. The self is above or prior to the ethical realm and hence “metaethical.”⁶⁷ As a result, metaethics is non-definitive.

This judgment points to two insights. First, the man is something more than a mere entity within the physical world. Second, contrary to what Kant goes on to argue from his first through his second critique of reason, the man also is something more than a mere entity within the moral world. As a solitary self with character, which is what the man is in itself as an element (in opposition to the man as an individual with personality within the world), the man is located beyond both worlds of rational knowledge.⁶⁸

However, the elemental self exhibits a further limitation from another direction, as well. As “closed in itself,” the elemental self is cut off from the very world it inhabits. The self, after all, knows nothing outside of itself, it is quintessentially solitary, and thus like the heroes of Attic tragedy “it is silent” (SR, 77). In addition, “this lack of all bridges and connections, this being

⁶⁷ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 80.

⁶⁸ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption*, 95.

turned only inward of the self,” according to Rosenzweig, “is what pours out that peculiar darkness over the divine and worldly in which the tragic hero moves. He does not understand what befalls him, and he is conscious of his not being able to understand” (SR, 78). Because the self is closed within itself, this passage suggests, even though it is self-grounded it is incomplete. Without connections to others, the self’s surroundings remain draped in darkness, and as a result the self cannot even understand her own self completely. In order to attain full understanding of itself and at once the security of its own being, the self demands bridges and connections to others.

Our survey of Rosenzweig’s scattered hints regarding the limitations of the elemental self have once again left us with clues as to what the self must seek out through relation in order to realize his potential, to fulfill what he is, as of yet, only as promise. The self will come to reconcile the unconditionality and the finitude of his freedom only in his relation to God in revelation. And the self will attain recognition for his “being in the particular” through the “bridges and connections” he will establish through neighborly love on the path to redemption. When the self has thereby realized its freedom and particular being through his reversals into relations with God and the world, the self will take his place in “the true All.” And the self will thereby realize itself at once as the One and All, in its own peculiar fashion.⁶⁹ The self possesses the world within itself as a personal property and not as a world. As a result, “the only humanity of which it was aware was that within its own four walls [...] elevated above any world, fixing its own interior within a defiant gaze, incapable of sighting anything alien except there in its own sphere and therefore only as its own property, hoarding all ethical norms within its own *ethos* so that the self was and remained lord of its *ethos*. In short: the metaethical.” (SR, 82)⁷⁰

In comparison to Hegel at the beginning of this essay, it seems that Rosenzweig’s description of the position of man, which he called metaethical, is meant to cut the basic tie between the human individual and the human whole or mankind. Since Rosenzweig accepts the interpretation of ethics as essentially the recognition of the whole or the recognition of the individual as a representative of the whole, the emphasis laid by him on the isolated individual can no longer be understood as an ethical interpretation of the ontological position of man. It becomes metaethical by being understood as referring to the self-enclosed individual. As metaphysics has been understood as the lack of identity between physics and the description of God, and as metalogic has been understood as the lack of identity between the logos and the reality of the world, metaethics is understood as the lack of identity between man as a self-enclosed individual in the first place and the totality of human beings or the whole of them. Hence, the writer understands Rosenzweig’s concept of metaethics not only as a continuation of his presentation of the two spheres to which we referred above God and world but also as a hidden polemic against Hegel’s identification of the human individual and the human *ethos* that led them to the primary reference to mankind at large. In fact, Rosenzweig applies the term *ethos*, but applies it not to the openness of the individual but to his self-enclosed character, in the strict sense of the latter term.

Rosenzweig continues to make a preparatory to a further step in his analysis by mentioning the ruling event of the hero (SR, 76). “The tragic hero of antiquity is nothing less than the metaethical self” (SR, 73). The hero is the person who has become a self by resolutely confronting his own death. That hero, that human self, can no longer speak nor even scream to

⁶⁹ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 192-193.

⁷⁰ It is significant that what is rendered in English as “lord” is in the original *Freiherr*, a term probably associated with “freedom”. See at: *Der Stern*, 90 (the writer’s note).

the world because as self it now lives its life in the most bitter inward solitary. The heroic self, called to itself from the world, willing its own finite being, must keep silent. For instance, in the case of Attic tragedy, Rosenzweig takes their silence to be an expression of defiance and judges their solitude to mean that they are unrelated to the world, i.e., each is a unique self (SR, 77). While they exemplify Rosenzweig's analysis of the elemental human, they also show the limitations of this form of analysis of the human in general: first, they are capable of monologue but not dialogue; second, the Greek heroes cannot even question their own fate, because to do so would break the silence and end the isolation. Their death merely fulfills their own tragic lives, i.e., they are the final achievement of isolation from the world in total self and character. This hero is metaethical as the world is metalogical and God is metaphysical. Nevertheless, the metaethical self is self-enclosed, like the God who cannot love, and like the world that has no beyond, deaf and dumb, existing without God or the self. The metaethical self is "lord of its *ethos*" (SR, 82), with no outside, no exteriority.

Their character becomes determined, and each becomes his own particular self, but none of them go beyond self and character to become a soul, which in Rosenzweig's language means to develop a term psyche or soul (die Seele) (SE, 86). When that self is extroverted in Part II of *the Star* and is opened first to God and then to the world, that self will emerge beyond its heroic silence as a speaking and loving soul.⁷¹ In other words, the capacity of the self to "say no" is the opening to "say yes".

Soul (beyond metaethics) as the subjectivity awakened in the intersubjectivity

By using the term psyche or soul, Rosenzweig not only makes the distinction between personality and self more obvious but opens a new level for self, a living subject. It is true that, for Rosenzweig, personality does not demand immortality for itself, but the self does. "Personality is satisfied with the eternity of the relations into which it enters and in which it is absorbed. The self has no relations, cannot enter into any, remains ever itself. Thus, it is conscious of being eternal; its immortality amounts to an inability to die." (SR, 79) Like the self, the soul is eternal, because it is non-relational, and it is immortal because it cannot die. It is what Greek philosophers called the soul. "The soul is supposed to be the natural something that is incapable of death by its very nature. Thus, it is theoretically separated from the body and becomes the bearer of the self." (Ibid.) Of course, the soul does not die, but transmigrates through the bodies. "The self demands self-preservation, preservation of the self. But the "soul" in the ancient sense of the word expressly designates only a "part" of man, the one incapable of dying, not his entirety." (Ibid.) Therefore, Rosenzweig argues for a new meaning for "soul" in order to wake the self in its complete speechlessness and unrelatedness up. "It would have to renounce precisely this speechlessness, it would have to turn from solitary self to speaking soul – but soul here in a different sense, meaning a human whole beyond the contrast of body and soul." (SR, 80)

After revealing the limitations of personality, character (and even self as metaethics), it seems that the clarification in the third stage of selfhood in Rosenzweig's account, the self as soul becomes the most significant point in order to clarify Rosenzweig's argument. A point of clarification about the term "soul" should probably be stressed right away to avoid possible distractions and confusions. In using the term "soul" Rosenzweig may well be alluding to, but he is certainly not referring to, the notion of a peculiar spiritual substance with which each person is meant to be endowed that somehow endures intact after death. "Soul" is indeed both "spiritual" and an endowment which comes through contact with exteriority, but for

⁷¹ Robert Gibbs, *op. cit.*, 54.

Rosenzweig it is the term of a relation rather than a substance in and of itself. “Soul” is precisely the self that emerges, and only emerges, at the intersubjective level. Intersubjectivity, for Rosenzweig, introduces a new and irreducible level of significance to subjectivity.⁷²

Rosenzweig’s account of the “soul” is also designed precisely to avoid the totalization in Hegel’s system.⁷³ In the Hegelian system, the thought of reconciliation, which “overwhelms” opposites, and a dialogical thought make a search for eschatological union: the embodied soul (die leibhaftige Seele) and the animated body (der seelenhafte Leib) will be united one day in an antithetical way.⁷⁴ For Rosenzweig, the word in which the two separated will unite is not an entity which overhangs them, but a word which they themselves utter: the word of love. So great is the significance of the alterity encountered frontally in the intersubjective encounter, as Rosenzweig sees it, that it has the power to open up the hard core, the very fixity, of character. The subjectivity awakened in intersubjectivity, the “soul,” opens up a new level for the self, indeed, a whole new way of life, one constituted by moral and social demands – demands which begin with and remain inextricably linked to the ultimate commander, God.⁷⁵

It is significant that, in the conceptual structure of *the Star*, the emergence of ethics from the experience of the fear of death, that is, the rupture of the totality, is only one step, though admittedly a primordial one, in a more essential process, which leads the self as soul toward the discovery of the central experience of its history, revelation. Revelation will, in turn, lead it to the conclusion of its adventure, its new conception of life. The dual link between revelation and death, on the one hand, and life, on the other, explains the secret logic that governs the spiritual path of the self.⁷⁶ It leads to a radically new understanding of reality, in which God, man, and the world, initially in radical separation, enter into relation with the categories of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. The event of this encounter, at the same time as its condition of possibility, is truly what Rosenzweig calls *Revelation*. This event (the “absolute present”) comprises, in turn, three temporal dimensions: the present of the past, in other words, *Creation*; the present of *Revelation* to strict sense, that is, of the love of God constantly offered to the soul; the future of *Redemption*, in other words, a world to be saved whose responsibility is entrusted to man.⁷⁷

Opening to love

It seems that Rosenzweig achieves a “revolution” in his analysis concerning man as metaethical self and beyond. The revolution appears in Rosenzweig to be the necessary condition for the inner revolution that will let man accede to dialogical discourse. This revolution is accomplished when the metaethical self breaks out of its elementary self-enclosure and opens itself to the double reality of the neighbor and God. This is why the transformation of the tragic hero (that paradigmatic figure of the metaethical self) into the man of revelation is presented as

⁷² Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 58.

⁷³ To some extent, Rosenzweig’s analysis also avoid the totalization which Heidegger achieved in two steps by reducing intersubjectivity to subjectivity and then by reducing subjectivity to a part in the world-historical ontological drama. See at: Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 59.

⁷⁴ Salomon Malka ed., *Le Dictionnaire Franz Rosenzweig: Une étoile dans le siècle*, 23.

⁷⁵ Richard A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, 59.

⁷⁶ Stéphane Mosès, “From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War,” 225.

⁷⁷ Salomon Malka ed., *Le Dictionnaire Franz Rosenzweig: Une étoile dans le siècle*, 24 (emphases added).

both radical conversion and expression of a profound continuity. Generally, for Rosenzweig the order of revelation is dependent on the temporal order. “Life, all life, must first become wholly temporal, wholly alive, before it can become eternal life.” (SR, 288)

Coming back to “soul”, the first and foremost crucial aspect of human soul, Rosenzweig writes, “is the soul awakened and loved by God.” (SR, 199) This same soul “awakened and loved by God,” is also the human “I” addressed by the human “Thou.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, “the love of the human, the earthly lover – that was a counterpart, nay more than a counterpart, it was a direct likeness of divine love.” (SR, 212) Rosenzweig’s point is that the impenetrable and imperturbable self-sufficiency of the character which enters into the intersubjective encounter, the character which as character and only as character, in contrast to the personality, cannot be absorbed or scattered by the term of that encounter, is nonetheless pierced and perturbed in that encounter. Only a religious language is sufficient to its excess.⁷⁹ The writer thus focuses mainly on two crucial terms, e.g., revelation and love.

First of all, in the conversion of metaethical man into the man of revelation, the elementary self is transformed into “I”, a substantivized adverb into a speaker. Indeed, this is not a return to traditional morals but rather the discovery of a different conception of ethics, based on the structures of dialogical discourse. In the experience of revelation, as Rosenzweig lays it out in the central chapter of Part II of *the Star*, what was self becomes I, the subject of a discourse addressed to a Thou; but this I does not become itself except to the degree that, even before that first word, in an anteriority more anterior than all anteriority, it had been addressed as a Thou by another I. At the origin of this linguistic model of revelation, there is a fundamental asymmetry: the experience of the I is always preceded by that of the Thou, or to put it another way, the I does not become what it is except in response to the call of the Thou. More precisely, the moment of revelation, the moment in which the metaethical self is transformed into I, is exactly the moment it discovers its dependency upon a reality investing it from without. That reality, interpreted as the reality of God in the foundational experience that is revelation, immediately takes on the form of the other, the neighbor, as soon as the I, in the second moment of its constitution, turns toward the world. The truth is that the subordination of the I to God and its subordination to the other are two aspects of the same structure of experience.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in book 2 of part II, in describing revelation, Rosenzweig uses his own expression: “thus and not-otherwise” (So und Nichtanders) (SE, 194). In using this expression, he is also deliberately rejecting the Hegelian comprehension of individuals through internal and external negation, through the logic of genus. “We could not be satisfied,” he writes, “with a sic et non based on the Scholastic model, we had to assert a Thus and not-otherwise, thus replacing the non with the double negative of a not-otherwise” (SR, 173). It will be explained that Rosenzweig’s double negative will be quite unlike and indeed will subvert Hegel’s double negation.⁸¹ The self is “thus and not-otherwise”: *thus* because it is separate, independent, itself; *not-otherwise* because it is nonetheless in relation to all things, to God, man, and world.

⁷⁸ This dialogical account of self, so totally at variance with Heidegger and the tradition of German idealist philosophy, is at home with another set of contemporary German thinkers: Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Eugen Rosenstock, and in France with Emmanuel Levinas (the writer’s note).

⁷⁹ Richard A. Cohen, *op.cit.*, 60.

⁸⁰ Stéphane Mosès, “From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War,” 227. Let us note in this connection that, in the analysis of the constitution of the divine identity in the Bible that Rosenzweig develops in the same passage, God himself only defines himself as I after man has been constituted as I opposite him (the writer’s note).

⁸¹ The correlation to Levinas’ “non” of non-in-difference could be recognized. See at: Richard A. Cohen, *op.cit.*, 169 (the writer’s note).

According to Rosenzweig, “it is already posited as otherwise than everything by the “thus” – the “not otherwise” coupled with the “thus” means precisely that, though otherwise, it is nevertheless not at the same time otherwise than everything, that is, capable of being related to everything” (SR, 174). Here again, at the center of Rosenzweig’s thought is an I that is both in relation and out of relation.⁸²

It is noticeable that the “I” always involves a contradiction,” Rosenzweig writes, “it is always underlined, always emphasized, always an “I, however” (SR, 173). The I that is “thus and not otherwise,” which is equivalent to the I that is “emphatic and underlined,” the “actual I,” is contradictory not because it is turned against itself through self-negating in the Hegelian manner, divided against itself but on the same plane as itself, where difference is unified through a comprehension of the identity of identity and difference, the *sic et non* of the Scholastic model. Rather the I is “thus and not otherwise” because it is ruptured or exceeded precisely by its relation to the other person, the interlocutor, the Thou, from whence the self gains its emphatic or underlined status.⁸³ The I’s separation, its independence, its thus (which philosophy turns into a totality by integrating, through negation, whatever is “otherwise”) maintains itself as itself and at the same time in relation to alterity, by becoming a “thus and not otherwise” precisely and only in relation to the other person, precisely and only through an immediate and excellent relation to the Other, where the Other comes first and takes priority over the I even while constituting, or re-constituting, the I.

Secondly, this fundamental asymmetry in the I-Thou relation, in which the Thou always precedes the I, translates, from the ethical point of view, into the subordination of the subject to the commandment. The commandment, independently of its specific content, signifies a shattering of human autonomy, the submission to an absolutely other who invests subjectivity from without. From this point of view, the commandment shatters the autonomy of the subject and deprives it of its freedom – or so it appears. But more profoundly, the I cannot face a radical exteriority unless it bears within itself the memory or trace of an original independence, precisely that of the metaethical self. The relation of the I to the commandment is absolutely different from the relation of the autonomous subject to the moral Law in Kant’s philosophy. In the first part of *the Star*, Rosenzweig criticizes Kant’s ethics (and, more generally, the theory of ethics of German Idealism) by showing that the freedom of the subject, believed to be accomplished by submission to the moral law, in reality disappears in the system of being, which alone confers upon it its supreme dignity. Through the dialectic of autonomy and the Law, it is in reality the impersonal principle of reason that, in a continuous process of emanation, takes possession of personal subjects and entirely absorbs them. Paradoxically, then, it is the relation of the heteronomous subject to the commandment, that is, to a word come from elsewhere, a word that constrains us to accomplish even the undesirable, that maintains it in its identity and its separation. That identity, prerequisite to all injunction and continuing to subsist after the injunction, is the identity of the metaethical self, the elementary root of the I, sign of a primordial self-enclosure that still remains alive at the very moment when it is being radically put into question. Such is the primordial intuition on which *the Star* is constructed: the authentic relation can only be established between beings necessarily separated beforehand. Here, in place of the movement of the procession of meaning by which, in Idealism, the absolute pours

⁸² Ibid. (emphases added).

⁸³ See at: “Das eigentliche, das unselbstverständliche, das betonte und unterstrichene Ich kann erstmalig laut werden in dem Entdecken des Du.” (SE, 195); “Only in the discovery of a Thou is it possible to hear an actual I, an I that is not self-evident but emphatic and underlined.” (SR, 175)

forth into the particular, Rosenzweig sets in opposition the movement of conversion by which the same opens itself to the call of the absolutely other.

The call of the absolutely other, breaking through and opening up the impermeable character, emerges in and as love, the “beloved soul”. Indeed, “it is in itself the shattering of man’s autonomy, the instituting, in a consciousness already opened up to the horizon of otherness of an affective relation toward the absolutely Other, toward that which precisely invests it from the outside. It is this relation that Rosenzweig calls love.”⁸⁴ Obviously, for Rosenzweig, the self that is simply given, the character, is an analytic component of an authentic self. A full conception of self, rather, requires that a self with such an orientation, such a givenness, the self with character, be the self “miraculously” loved and as such capable of love. Such is the vulnerable and responsible self, a self called higher than being to a vocation better than being: to the vocation of love. Love will become the keystone of Rosenzweig’s conception of the self, and, indeed, in the heart of the center in book 2 of part II.

Conclusion

Sketching the road from personality to living man (*lebendige Mensch*) helps us to comprehend Rosenzweig’s analysis goes far beyond “an ontological analysis” as portrayed in the very title of our paper. The personality, which lives lost in its purely social roles, is stunned one day to find its deeper character. This character moves toward its own uniqueness to its true self as metaethics, but its coming to itself is diverted and redirected by love. Through the “revelation” of love, the character is reconditioned by its soul, authentically, that is, lovingly and ethically engaged in dialogue with others: to hear the other and to respond to the other in turn. Only as first given in character can the soul enter into the penetrating love, the necessity, of the “I-Thou,” without being torn up by the system of essence so well described by Hegel, rather than a human-divine love. Through Rosenzweig’s analysis, the writer therefore argues that he not only refuses the system of essence but also opens a new perspective, launched by love and aiming for love, a love that cannot be “purely human” (SR, 201). And so, there is no philosophy without a transcendent aspect or human-divine love. The aspect of such a dialogue goes truly far beyond any kind of abstract ideas, categories or essences of the traditional philosophy.

Furthermore, it is essential to point out that while Rosenzweig emphasizes the radical difference in the ontological sphere between God, man and world in part I, he focuses mainly on the relation in part II. It is very the relation that man really “ex-sist” as living man as a loved, called I in the “I-Thou” relation (SR, 178). Rosenzweig argues that only the call of love from “other” can open up an enclosed, separated self and be able to engage in a dialogue in love. Noticeably, the “other”, the one who gives a name, also belongs to a call. “It was – and it is – a call: a call that the other addresses to me, to recognize him, to recognize him as a human being; and thus, a call to responsibility.”⁸⁵ In other words, it is very the “I” is drawn out of its mute and isolated self-enclosure, by God’s emerging from God’s concealment, questing for and turning to the individual human self (SR, 156). That is how Rosenzweig understands God’s question to Abraham – in the vocative, in direct address, not with an indefinite “you” but with his proper name “Abraham” – that is, in all his non-conceptual individuality, in love for his singularity. And so, “now he answers, all unlocked, all spread-apart, all ready, sill soul: Here I am. Here is

⁸⁴ Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, 113.

⁸⁵ Jean-François Marquet, “L’articulation des personnes dans la pensée de Franz Rosenzweig,” in *Héritages de Franz Rosenzweig: Nous et les Autres*, ed. Myriam Bienenstock (Paris: Editions de l’Éclat, 2015), 189.

the I, the individual human I, as yet wholly receptive, as yet only unlocked, only empty, without content, without nature, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears.” (SR, 176)

Finally, it is significant that metaethics in Rosenzweig’s thought opens an original approach and perspective in comparison to other dominant philosophical trends. Metaethics, as mentioned, emphasizes a living man being able to hear from “other,” to respond and to take responsibility. In particular, Rosenzweig even seems to have insisted a lot on this affirmation: rather than saying with Descartes “I think, so I am,” one must say “I am given a name, so I am.”⁸⁶ or even “God called me, so I am.”⁸⁷ Rosenzweig too had underlined that the authentic I (das eigentliche Ich) is not self-evident, that it exists only in response to a “call,” the call of its name. Indeed, only the call of love from “other” can open up an enclosed and separated self.⁸⁸ It leads man to become living man to live a more worthwhile life, that is, to live for higher truth and “others” rather than for oneself.

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⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Myriam Bienenstock, *Cohen face à Rosenzweig: Débat sur la pensée allemande* (Paris: Vrin, 2009), 114.

⁸⁸ Rosenzweig, through this approach, also develops a new potential for philosophy which he calls “speech-thinking” (Sprachdenken), as will be developed in part II and part III of *the Star*. In addition, this resonance can easily be found in the philosophy of Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and to some extent, the modern philosophy of language (the writer’s note).

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Appendix

The Particularity of Nothing as Rosenzweig's Alternative

The introduction of *the Star* begins with Hegel's philosophy (SR, 5-6) and concludes with Rosenzweig's new philosophy (SR, 7). Rosenzweig distinguished between the philosophical tradition and his own new mode of thought with terms the philosophy (*die Philosophie*) and the new thinking (*das neue Denken*), respectively (SE, 8). The first implied a scholarly discipline, a preserve of great ideas. For Rosenzweig, all canonical thought of this sort was associated with morbidity. When Rosenzweig used "philosophy" in this special sense of the Western tradition, he meant to name something hopelessly defunct. By contrast, the word thinking (*Denken*) in Rosenzweig's usage implied process, movement, temporality.⁸⁹

Philosophy, for Rosenzweig, has until now endorsed man based on concepts and essences which are inevitably abstract. Thus, he calls for a radical "new thinking." Rosenzweig's "new thinking" is not a more authentic modality of being, a correction of the relationship between being and thinking that the history of philosophy has itself masked and distorted, but rather a complex recognition of the limitations of rational thought which is at the same time a complex acceptance and encounter with what is irreducibly other to rational thought.⁹⁰

Rosenzweig understands the failure of the systems of German Idealism to lie precisely in their reduction of particular beings to nothing. By revealing how the philosophical tradition culminating in German Idealism fails to grasp the irreducible particularity of the individual self caught between being and nothing, the insights Rosenzweig draws from the fear of death precipitate a breakup of Philosophy's All into three. They set in motion a process of reflection that leads thought to recognize before itself no longer the single reductive "knowable All" of philosophy, but rather three kinds of beings, three "irrational objects"⁹¹ of which "we know nothing" (SE, 21). Furthermore, Rosenzweig denies to philosophy the ability to grasp God, world, and man through the traditional, rational tools at its disposal, and he rejects its tendency to root two of these beings in the other one:

The All of thinking and being, the hitherto fundamentally simple content of philosophy, split up for us into three separate parts. [...] In a strict sense, we know nothing at all about these three parts – God, World, Man – even though we have already spoken about them in free connection to the universal consciousness of the current time. They are the nothings in which Kant the dialectician critiqued the objects of the three "rational sciences" of his time, rational theology, cosmology, and psychology. We do not think

⁸⁹ Peter Eli Gordon, *op.cit.*, 138.

⁹⁰ Richard A. Cohen, *op.cit.*, 46.

⁹¹ "Irrational" here means that it lacks the articulate bonds with the Universal as reason would demand. Note that "irrational" just means "prior to," in that it is the condition upon which meanings can be taken up for cognitive inspection. Talking about "irrational" objects should not mislead us into regarding Rosenzweig as a philosopher "against" reason. See at: Peter Eli Gordon, *op. cit.*, 168.

to restore them here as objects of rational science, but rather, just the opposite, as “irrational” objects (*irrationale Gegenstände*). (SR, 19)

To highlight their position outside the boundaries of Philosophy’s traditional scope, Rosenzweig designates these beings with the prefix *meta*, that is, the metaphysical God, the metalogical world, and the metaethical human being.⁹² In other words, Hegel presupposed that the All must constitute a unified totality because otherwise thinking itself could not be unified. However, Rosenzweig rejects the claim that thought is a unity (SR, 12). The first, *metalogic*, is the movement of thought beyond mathematical logic in thinking about the world. The second, *metaphysics*, is the movement of thought beyond mathematical logic in thinking about God. *Metaethics* is the movement of thought beyond mathematical ethics in thinking about man. *Metaethics* projects a human individual who stands outside of all that is encompassed in Hegel’s philosophy and as such falsifies the claimed success of that philosophy to comprehend absolutely everything.⁹³

Rosenzweig came to reject the possibility of grasping the inherent difference of particular beings as the product of the self-differentiation of the Absolute. This would surely imply that if God, man, and world are to be grasped as such and in their interconnection, each must first be taken up independently of the others; it implies that no one of them be posited as the ground or essence of the others. It is because Rosenzweig denies the implicit unity of the All at the beginning of his system, because he finds ground for this denial in the particularity of the nothing by which the man is confronted in death, that he demands that the three kinds of being posited by the tradition of special metaphysics themselves be taken up individually, each in its own relation to its nothing.⁹⁴

The existential experience of nothingness in death is thereby transformed into a rule guiding Rosenzweig’s approach to the three elemental nothings which confront him after his breakup of the All of philosophy:

We seek the everlasting, which does not first need thinking in order to be. That is why we could not deny death, and that is why we must take up Nothing, wherever and however it may meet us, and make it into the everlasting starting-point of the everlasting. “*The*” Nothing may not mean for us the disclosure of the essence of pure being as it did for the great heir of two millennia of the history of philosophy. Rather, wherever a being element of the All rests in itself, indissoluble and everlasting, for this Being it is valid to assume *a* Nothing, its Nothing.⁹⁵

Rosenzweig’s positing of God, world, and man as independent “being elements” outside thinking, elements which “do not first need thinking in order to be,” hence returns us to Rosenzweig’s basic argument with German Idealism, Hegel’s philosophy in particular, over

⁹² Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 144-145. This issue in terms of meta and metaethics will be further clarified in the following sections (the writer’s note).

⁹³ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and Doctrine of Creation*, 34-35.

⁹⁴ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 146.

⁹⁵ The translation is mine (emphases added). “Wir suchen nach Immerwährendem, das nicht erst des Denkens bedarf um zu sein. Deshalb durften wir den Tod nicht verleugnen und deshalb müssen wir das Nichts, wo und wie es uns begegnen mag, aufnehmen und zum immerwährenden Ausgangspunkt des Immerwährenden machen. „Das“ Nichts darf uns nicht Wesensenthüllung des reinen Seins bedeuten, wie dem großen Erben der zwei Jahrtausende Philosophiegeschichte. Sondern wo immer ein seiendes Element des All in sich selber ruht, unauflöslich und immerwährend, da gilt es, diesem Sein ein Nichts, sein Nichts, vorauszusetzen.” (SE, 22)

Nothing. Through its presupposition of the “one and universal Nothing,” Hegel’s philosophy grasps nothing as “the Nothing” which is at once “the essence of pure being.” Insofar as “the Nothing” with which the Idealists began their systems already presupposes, already contains within itself, the unity of the All to be attained through the system, Rosenzweig suggested, the Idealist systems are fated to fail to grasp the difference, the determination, inherent to the manifold of particularity. From the experience of the fear of death, Rosenzweig discovers the particularity of the individual self and its rootedness in its own nothing, and he now concludes that such a rootedness in the particular nothing holds for every “being element” given in experience, for God, world, and man.⁹⁶

It is useful to summarize Rosenzweig’s argument concerning the goals of the new philosophy whose method will be clarified later. The first is to study the three elements as irrational objects rather than as rational subjects of the three rational sciences. The second is to move from the specific nothings of each element to their something in knowledge. The third goal of the new philosophy is to start with something concrete, and, through analysis, to negate it as it is known, and then to posit or affirm it as something that otherwise is unknown. In Rosenzweig’s language, this something that is discovered through philosophical analysis is a not Nothing (*nicht Nichts*).⁹⁷ “Our goal is not a negative concept, but on the contrary a highly positive one [...] We seek God, and will presently seek world and man, not as one concept among many, but rather for itself, dependent on itself alone, in its absolute actuality (if the expression is not subject to misunderstanding); in other words, precisely in its positiveness.” (SR, 23) Now we understand why Rosenzweig calls a “new thinking” – “new” because each of the three elements is independent, separate from one another, absolutely out of relation to one another, and at the same time absolutely in relation to one another.

Initial ideas about meta and metaethics

Meta

Before analyzing Franz Rosenzweig’s concept of metaethics, we should consider the meaning Rosenzweig attached to the notion and position of meta in general. He refers to metaphysics in the context of his discussion of God and His being, to metalogic in the context of the world and its meaning, and to metaethics in his consideration of man and his self.

The prime elements of *the Star* are God, world, and man, as outlined in part I. Such elements must be grasped not only in relational terms but also, and more deeply, in their own independence. The work of part I consists in wrenching these three basic elements out of the ideational contexts within which they are inevitably grasped by the thought Rosenzweig calls “Idealist,” by which he means mainstream ontology “from Parmenides to Hegel.” Rosenzweig cannot just posit these terms to establish their independence. Instead, Rosenzweig takes these elements as creations, in the case of the world and man, and ultimate creator in the case of God. This explains the neologisms of part I and the projects of developing a new understanding of the elements. Because Rosenzweig uses the prefix “meta” to indicate elemental independence from the synthesizing logic of rational thought, he uses the term “metaphysics” to refer to a

⁹⁶ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 149.

⁹⁷ Rosenzweig coins this term. It seems that there is no equivalent term in English. Some scholars, Samuelson and Cohen, for instance, translate “*nicht Nichts*” into “a double negation”. See at: Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption*, 45 (the writer’s note).

transcendent God, “metalogic” to refer to the independence of the (created) world, and “metaethics” to refer to the independence of (created) man.⁹⁸

The “meta” here is used in a nonconventional sense to mean an “exceeding” of the traditional concepts of God-world-man that do not entail leaving those concepts behind or somehow transcending them. Rather, Rosenzweig’s intention is actually to take the classical views of God-world-man as points of “orientation” (die Orientierung) (SR, 19) for his new accounts. The “meta-” signals that each element is to be related to in a new way, that our orientation to the three elements is a new one. The elements become newly available or thinkable in that each has “stepped out” of the way it has conventionally been known (SR, 11).⁹⁹

It is indisputable that the critique of the All is the guiding axis of all that Rosenzweig writes, at the beginning of *the Star*, introducing the notion of meta: “the All can thus no longer claim to be all: it has forfeited its uniqueness” (SR, 11). Now the identity of thinking and of being¹⁰⁰ “presupposes an inner nonidentity” (SR, 13) which precisely allows thinking to identify with being. Thus, the notion of meta has the function of preserving the irreducible ontological position of each of the three spheres and their uniqueness. Any search for continuity is therefore opposed to the maintenance of the irreducibility of the three spheres. The role of the notion of meta is to oppose the “idealistic” tendency which aims at reducibility.

It is therefore not surprising that Rosenzweig begins his exposition of metaphysics with a reflection on the negative attributes of God. Historically, traditional theology or negative theology, which Rosenzweig calls “physics,” because it studied God as a first principle underlying the existence of the universe, reached its summit in the Middle Ages with Maimonides’ doctrine of negative divine attributes. “This theology dismembered and abolished the existing assertions about God’s attributes, until the negative of all these attributes remained behind as God’s essence.” (SR, 23) This path leads from an existing Something to Nothing and leads to the conclusion that we know nothing about God. Thus, Rosenzweig takes the opposite way from Nothing to Something. And so, he starts new thinking about God – metaphysics and its goal is not a negative concept but, on the contrary, a highly positive one. The starting point is the negative concept that we must leave behind us, because, before us, there is a something that is targeted: “the reality of God” (SR, 24). The research no longer refers to its Hegelian sense of self-understanding, but emphasizes what is separate and therefore folded oneself in a self: “He keeps his *physis* to himself, and therefore remains what he is: the metaphysical.” (SR, 40)

Next, Rosenzweig calls “logic” traditional ontology or negative cosmology because it attempts to discover the logic implicit in the world. It reaches its summit in the seventeenth century in Descartes’ reflections on human consciousness and Spinoza’s thinking about the substance of God as foundations for all philosophical speculation about the general nature of the world. Both philosophers realized that as long as thought is limited to the forms available in philosophy, we cannot be sure that there in fact is an external world (external either to human consciousness in Descartes’ case or to divine substance in Spinoza’s). This doubt in modern philosophy – that it

⁹⁸ Richard A. Cohen, *op.cit.*, 96.

⁹⁹ Dana Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 23.

¹⁰⁰ It is considerable that W. Hallo mistranslated “das Denken” into “reasoning” instead of “thinking”. See at: *The Star*, 6; *Der Stern*, 6 and many places.

cannot know anything with certainty about an external world – begins Rosenzweig’s new thinking about the world, which he calls “metalogue” (SR, 41).

Likewise, Rosenzweig will say about metalogue that “the disconcerting fact about the world is, after all, that it is not spirit.” (SR, 45) And it is still in the negative mode, a variation on the irreducibility that Rosenzweig undertakes by making it the common character to the world and to knowledge that we can have of it: “The sun is no less a wonder than the sunlike quality of the eye which spies it. Beyond both, beyond the plenitude as well as the arrangement, there is immediately the Nothing, the Nothing of the world.” (Ibid.) The Nothing is indeed a metalogical notion, that is to say, above and beyond the point where we could just say the world is the same at the thinking: “the individual phenomena emerge from the night, baseless and aimless. Whence they are coming or whither going has not been inscribed on their foreheads: they simply exist. But in existing they are individual, each a one against all others, each distinguished from all others, “particular,” “not-otherwise.” (Ibid.) Rosenzweig therefore refuses, Hegel in particular, that there can be any legitimacy to establish continuity between singular realities, in any field whatsoever: “Society, in Hegel, is developed from its position between the family and the state [...] But the metalogical vision [...] creates a new type of philosopher. Here too the way, and a way of his own at that, leads from the individual philosopher, as before, from each individual thing, as individual, to the whole.” (SR, 52) The system at which one arrives is necessarily multidimensional; its unity is from the philosopher’s experienced and personal point of view.

Finally, concerning “metaethics”, this prefix “meta-” does not refer to any discursive hierarchy either: meta-ethics does not mean the discourse on moral standards (such as the metalanguage would designate, for example, grammatical speech), but what is prior to ethics. Rosenzweig does not seek to analyze moral notions, but thus designates what is beyond ethics, that is to say, the ontological situation of man. That is the reason why the third book of part I opens with a “negative psychology”. Traditional rational psychology or negative psychology, which Rosenzweig calls “ethics”, because moral thinking is the kind of thought that is most distinctive of the human psyche, reaches its summit in the nineteenth century in Kant’s analysis of human consciousness as a Transcendental Unity of Apperception. It constitutes the human mind as a rational entity that lies beyond anything that can be thought within the limits of the forms of thinking available in philosophy. This doubt in what was for Rosenzweig contemporary philosophy – that it cannot know anything positive about what is distinctively human – begins Rosenzweig’s new thinking about the human, which he calls “metaethics” (SR, 62-63).

Rosenzweig recognizes in Kant the merit of having made the “I”, of what seems most obvious, “the most questionable object” (SR, 62). The knowing “I” would be knowable only in its relation to the to know, in its “fruits” and not *per se*. What Rosenzweig seeks to establish is that, no more than the world or God, the individual being of man is not demonstrable. He also assures that knowledge is not an instrument that will prove the reality and the essence of the spheres closed on them, because the knowledge “necessarily loses itself in the Nothing” (SR, 63).

In summary, traditional philosophy attempts to positively construct rational, scientific knowledge of the All. In fact, it concluded that three distinct elements are negative, which we know nothing about. Philosophy first identified “God” as a negative element in the Middle

Ages, then the “world” in the early modern period, and, in the preceding century, the element “human.” Part I of *the Star* thus applies the new thinking to each of these elements.¹⁰¹

Metaethics

It seems that the emergence of ethics from the experience of the anguish of death, that is, the rupture of the totality, is only one step, though admittedly a primordial one, in a more essential process, which leads the self (das Selbst) as metaethics toward the discovery of the central experience, a living subject – as will be mentioned in the following chapters.

First of all, it should be stressed that the notion of meta is an ontological reference that, as such, cannot be subsumed under any broader sphere or dimension. Thus, for instance, when in referring to man’s metaethical position Rosenzweig says that man will always be under the spell of the fear of death (SR, 4), he sought to emphasize the irreducible ontological position of man. That again comes to the fore in his statement that the All could not die and nothing could die in the All. The All designates the broad sphere in which man is included or immersed, but once Rosenzweig introduces a demarcation line between man and the All, the aspect of man’s irreducibility is highlighted. In other words, not only Idealism with its denial of everything that would distinguish the singular from the All is rejected, but positively speaking, the position of an independent and even secluded ontological status becomes central. Man – regarded as a singularity or peculiarity (Eigenheit)¹⁰² – must precede any philosophical efforts that would regard him as reducible and subsumable under ethical norms and systematic essences. Rosenzweig names this kind of dissociated human being “metaethical.”¹⁰³

Rosenzweig does as well as describing an ultimate ontological situation which is that of man, and which is not subsumed by any totality. That Rosenzweig points here to the ontological status of man is significant not only for understanding the concept of metaethics, but also for being guided on the theme of *meta* in general. The conception of man cannot be reduced to a spirit or essence, because it also has a “soul” (die Seele). It seems that, in this context, the notion of soul is meant to imply something more specific and thus more individual than the concept of essence. For instance, his critique of Schopenhauer is obvious: “he [Schopenhauer] made will the essence of the world and thereby let the world dissolve in will, if not will in the world. Thus, he annihilated the distinction so alive in himself, between the being of man and the being of the world.” (SR, 10)

The point of departure of Rosenzweig’s analysis appertaining to the concept *meta* is the emphasis on fundamental distinctions in terms of the position of man as well as the position of the spheres to which man could be viewed as belonging and which thus eventually absorbs him. “Philosophy had intended to grasp man, even man as a “personality,” in ethics. But that was an impossible endeavor. For if and as it grasped him, he was bound to dissolve in its grasp.” (SR, 10) Indeed, it emphasizes man in the utter singularity of his own being, in his being determined by a first and a last name, stepped out of the world which knew itself as the thinkable world, out of the All of philosophy. Again, the criticism of the notion of the All or the totality is the guiding principle of Rosenzweig’s variations on the meta theme. This is expressed in his statement: “the All can thus no longer claim to be all: it has forfeited its uniqueness.” (SR, 11)

¹⁰¹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption*, 86-87.

¹⁰² Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 69. Furthermore, “Eigenheit” might be translated into “singularity,” “peculiarity,” “particularity”, and “idiosyncrasy” (the writer’s note).

¹⁰³ Peter Eli Gordon, *op.cit.*, 168.

Hence, the notion of meta is introduced in order to save the irreducible ontological position and thus the uniqueness of the elements.¹⁰⁴ As a result, metaethics projects a human individual who stands outside of all that is encompassed in Hegel's philosophy and as such falsifies the claimed success of that philosophy to comprehend absolutely everything.

Secondly, it is precisely the annulment of the self at the heart of the totality that, for Rosenzweig, destroys the very foundations of true ethics. In Rosenzweig's view, ethics can only spring from a radical freedom, an original possession of self by self. In the wake of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Rosenzweig subverts the Hegelian thesis of the end of philosophy from top to bottom. If everything has become philosophy, each individual should be able to begin philosophizing on his own. Concretely, "if God existed, how could I bear not to be God?" (SR, 18) Against the background of the historical philosophy of essence, it is this repossession of the subject by itself that the introduction to *the Star* comes to proclaim. It is the primordial autonomy of man as subject in his own right that Rosenzweig qualifies as "meta-ethical." This metaethical dimension, as mentioned in the following chapters, is the original self-enclosure of his self.

From this point of view, the primary foundation of the self is in a sense beyond good and evil, an elementary affirmation of self-preceding all morals, which Rosenzweig associates with the idea of an "intelligible character" (SR, 10) in Kant. This metaethical root of the self, characterized by an original form of perseverance in being, is illustrated in the history of Western culture by the hero of Greek tragedy. He represents for Rosenzweig man in his elementary separation, in his pure self-affirmation. Closed up in his tragic solitude, he does not succeed in truly communicating, either with other men or with the gods. This faithfulness to oneself, this stubbornness of the self in affirming itself in spite of everything, is very far from morality conceived of as a submission to the Law or from essences conceived of as a system. Yet it appears in Rosenzweig to be the necessary condition for the inner revolution that will let man accede to true humanity.¹⁰⁵ This revolution, by coining the word "revelation," will be mentioned at the end of this paper.

Finally, metaethics could be understood as a new way to approach man. To attain a new understanding of the man – to get to a "something" beyond the "nothing" to which psychology was reduced by the Kantian transcendental dialectic – is the movement Rosenzweig projects from the ethical to the metaethical: "thus, beyond the orbit described by ethics lay the virgin territory made available to thought by Nietzsche. Precisely when one does not, in the blind joy of destruction, destroy the spiritual labors of the past, but rather allows them to be fully valid in what they have accomplished, this being-beyond of the new question with respect to all that alone was comprehended, and was allowed to be comprehended, by the concept of ethics must be recognized." (SR, 11) Rosenzweig accomplishes this in part I book 3 of *the Star* (Man and His Self, or Metaethics), where he develops a concept of man as a "peculiarity" or "idiosyncrasy" (Eigenheit) that resists (or that, once again, "remains over" after) totalization by means of knowledge as classically conceived (SR, 64) and as a "self" as distinguished from standard concepts of individuality (SR, 67). "Individuals" are by definition capable of, or even destined for, aggregation into pluralities such as species, peoples, and groups, and, ultimately, humanity. As "personality", man "plays the role that has been assigned to him," a role that originates in "fate" and that is "one role beside others." The "self", by contrast, is utterly

¹⁰⁴ Nathan Rotenstreich, *op.cit.*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁵ Stéphane Mosès, "From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophy of War," 226.

singular, no part of a whole, unavailable to pluralization, and incomparable. It is “Adam, man himself.” (SR, 68)

As a retrieval of human being as a concrete singularity or an emphatic particularity, Rosenzweig’s philosophy is concerned with the finitude of human existence. This is famously indicated in the opening lines of *the Star*, in which its project, the questions that it will ask, are motivated “from death, from the fear of death,” which philosophy, in forgetting human existence, has been unable to acknowledge.

It is clear that Hegel’s “All” becomes the elements God, world, and man in the new philosophy. The presence of God, world, and man corresponds to “irrational objects”. From Hegelian rational sciences of theology, cosmology, and psychology, and their corresponding elements God, world, and man, we move by way of negation to Rosenzweig’s meta-rational sciences. Hegel’s sciences posit something (Etwas), the negation of which yields three distinct instances of nothing (Nichts) that are the starting point of Rosenzweig’s analysis. Rosenzweig calls them “irrational objects” (SR, 19). However, as seen in the body of Part I, irrational should not be understood to mean incomprehensible. They are no more and no less intelligible than are irrational numbers in mathematics. Rather, just as a new math was required to encompass irrational as well as rational numbers, Rosenzweig begins a new philosophy to encompass the irrational as well as the rational elements of reality. The transitional philosopher from the old to the new philosophy was Rosenzweig’s teacher in Jewish philosophy, Hermann Cohen.¹⁰⁶

A fundamental method

The infinitesimal calculus of Hermann Cohen

It seems that the question “how to get something from nothing?” is the crucial one in Hermann Cohen’s discussion on the *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*. The Nothing is not an absolute nothing: “the Nothing must not be thought of as the erection of a Non-Thing or an absurdity, a name for the denial of the Something.” Rather, it is a “relative Nothing,” a means for discovering the Something.¹⁰⁷

For Rosenzweig, too, the Nothing has a crucial role in the generation of the basic elements. In order to reach these “irrational” objects (SR, 19), Rosenzweig proposes a path “from the Nothings of knowledge” to the “Something of knowledge” – a path that he opposes to traditional philosophy, which begins only where thought becomes wedded to being. For this way of proceeding, it is the science of mathematics that leads the way, for mathematics is “itself nothing but the constant derivation of a something [...] from Nothing.” (SR, 20) Hence, Rosenzweig emphasizes the role of Maths, particularly the infinitesimal of Hermann Cohen, in his analysis:

The differential combines in itself the characteristics of the Nothing and the Something. It is a Nothing which points to a Something, its Nothing; at the same time, it is a Something that still slumbers in the lap of the Nothing. It is on the one hand the dimension as this loses itself in the immeasurable, and then again it borrows, as the “infinitesimal,” all the characteristics of finite magnitude with the sole exception of finite magnitude itself. Thus, it draws its power to establish reality on the one hand from the forcible negation with which it breaks the lap of the Nothing, and on the other hand

¹⁰⁶ Hermann Cohen (1842-1918): was a German-Jewish philosopher, one of the founders of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism (the writer’s note).

¹⁰⁷ Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1977), 105.

equally from the calm affirmation of whatever borders on the Nothing to which, as itself infinitesimal, it still and all remains attached. (SR, 20-21)

In discussion of Hermann Cohen's infinitesimal calculus, Rosenzweig makes explicit his ontology of something from nothing. Rosenzweig explicitly claims that this calculus provided him with a model for constructing reality from what is practically (but not absolutely) nothing.¹⁰⁸ In the Cohen's logic of the infinitesimal calculus, every origin is in a nothing (whose mathematical symbol is "0"), but the nothing is not a general nothing.¹⁰⁹ The infinitesimal method's first triumph is the generation of something (x) from nothing (dx). That real x is further reflected through reiterative processes of infinitesimal judgments until it achieves actuality.¹¹⁰ In other words, Cohen is the source of Rosenzweig's judgment that reality consists of movements rather than things or substances, and these movements are from an origin in nothing to an end in something. The real objects – God, man, and world – are actually not objects or essences at all, but processes. It seems that it is Rosenzweig's major break with Hegel and the old philosophy.

Cohen claims that the infinitesimal method can generate quantity from quality. Integration is a kind of rational reflection which generates a discrete variable (x) from an infinitesimal unit (dx). To integrate a curve over a continuous line, one adds up the area of very small rectangular bands between points on the curve and that line. Repeated additions, shrinking the width of the bands, produce closer approximations to the exact area between the curve and the line. Cohen's interpretation of integration notes that the possibility of determining the area by this approximation depends on a principle of continuity of the line – that we could not do the operation of shrinking the width of the bands repeatedly unless the line was strictly continuous. The width of the bands is represented by the symbol dx when we let the bands go as narrow as we want; dx, therefore, is the mathematical judgment of the line's continuity, but that judgment undergirds the approximation process and is not derivative from it. As the narrowest possible width, dx must be infinitesimally small, but then dx is both something (> 0) and nothing ($= 0$). As the judgment of continuity, dx can be as small as we wish and so ends up as nothing, but through integration it yields the real something (x), for the result of integration is a function dependent not on the infinitesimal dx, but on the real variable x. As a variable, the reality (Realität) of x is not the existence of some determinate thing but only a variable in a function that defines a relation. In his ontology, Cohen's term for reality makes only the weaker claim of determinate definition (the stronger claim would be for objective actuality (Wirklichkeit)).¹¹¹

Two ways of affirmation and negation

Rosenzweig, following Cohen, sets out two paths from this knowing nothing. The first is a path of affirmation (Cohen's judgment of origin, a "Yes"); the second, of negation (Cohen's judgment of contradiction, a "No").¹¹² "Thus, it opens two paths from the Nothing to the Something the path of the affirmation of what is not Nothing (nicht Nichts), and the path of the negation of the Nothing (Nichts). Of course, "mathematics is the guide for the sake of these two paths. It teaches us to recognize the origin of the Something in the Nothing." (SR, 21)

¹⁰⁸ Norbert M. Samuelson, "The Concept of Nichts in Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption," 70.

¹⁰⁹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User's Guide to Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption*, 46.

¹¹⁰ Hermann Cohen, "The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method and its History," in *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, ed. S. Luft, trans. D. Hyder and L. Patton (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), §32.

¹¹¹ Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 134-136.

¹¹² Robert Gibbs, *op. cit.*, 51.

Rosenzweig describes the emergence of the something from the nothing here as a movement, as a “path from the Nothing to the Something,” but insofar as the differential itself describes a particular nothing that is at once something, this emergence may also be conceived as occurring within the particular nothing itself. In other words, the two paths from nothing to something are two ways in which the particular nothing itself becomes its something.¹¹³

However, how is the emergence of God, world, and man out of their respective nothings? In fact, the coming into being of each element originally from its nothing can only be grasped, according to Rosenzweig, if that emergence is seen both as the affirmation of what is not Nothing, and the path of the negation of the Nothing. If the determinate nothing of the differential shows two ways in which the something of that nothing is implicit within it, this something takes form only when these two ways join. Each element attains its form, to use Rosenzweig’s formal language, as the “And” of “Yes” and “No”.

Corresponding to the affirmative and negative poles within each element are two polar attributes whose unification likewise grants the given element its singular form: the attribute of “substantiality” or “being,” on the one hand, and “action,” on the other. Concretely, the affirmation of what is not-Nothing within each element (Yes) always corresponds to a certain quality of “substantiality” or “being” attributed to that element, while the negation of Nothing within each element (No) always corresponds to an “active” quality attributed to the element.¹¹⁴

As for the union by means of the And (das Und), this And actually is no longer directly concerned with the construction out of the differential. Rather, this union is affected by that which has arisen from both the Yes and the No, and in particular from the No. Rosenzweig speaks of “in him [man] too the initial words awaken, the Yes of creation, the No of generation and the And of configuration.”¹¹⁵ That is to say, the Yes stands in relation to its result, to the infinite, as begetter, while the No in its begetting of the finite at the same time lays the basis for creative activity of this finite itself. The And merely grasps a posteriori the result of this activity of the finite. The union of the infinite and the finite thus is already a self-configuration as well, irrespective of the subsequent fluctuations conditioned by the advance of the system. The finite, on account of its issue from the differential through direct negation of the Nothing, is conceived as active, and the infinite, which arose out of the indirect affirmation of the Nothing, i.e., as affirmation of its opposite, is conceived as passive.¹¹⁶

Rosenzweig introduces his model meta-scientific sentence and describes its logical mode with his own equation. It is $y = x$ or a result of construction “finite-and-infinite” (SR, 27-28). In a sentence of the form $y = x$, the left hand term is the grammatical subject, the semantic subject and a negative supposition (Setzung). Conversely, the right hand term is the grammatical predicate, the semantic content, and an affirmative determination of the subject (Bestimmung). In Rosenzweig’s logic, a sentence of this form expresses a universal conditional (if anything is a y then it is a x) and not an identity claim.¹¹⁷ He himself calls this a logical-mathematical symbol truth of the sentence, from the qualities that the subject, predicate and copula have in

¹¹³ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 158 (emphases added).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹¹⁵ The translation is mine. “Auch in ihm erwachen die Urworte, das schaffende Ja, das zeugende Nein, das gestaltende Und.” (SE, 68) Again, Hallo uses ancient English terms in his translation, e.g. “Yea” and “Nay”, for “Ja” and “Nein” in original German respectively. See at: *Der Stern*, 26; *the Star*, 24 and many other places.

¹¹⁶ Else Rahel-Freund, *Franz Rosenzweig’s Philosophy of Existence: An Analysis of The Star of Redemption*, trans. Stephen L. Weinstein and Robert Israel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 92.

¹¹⁷ Norbert M. Samuelson, “The Concept of Nichts in Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption,” 71.

the sentence. For him, the formulas accordingly are “primeval statements” (SR, 43) about God, world and man.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the difference between his logical symbolism and Aristotle’s as the difference between a logic of origins and non-origins is considerable. In an Aristotelian logic of non-origins, “S is P” means that given anything at all, if it is S then it is P. As such no claim is made about existence. It is only an abstract affirmation of the relationship between abstract forms. In contrast, in Rosenzweig’s logic of origins, $y = x$ makes an existential claim. It says that a particular nothing, called “y”, moves towards becoming a particular something, called “x.”¹¹⁹ In other words, $y=x$ asserts that a grammatical subject y is in some form of intransitive relation with a predicate. Affirming y entails affirming x, where y is a No and x is a Yes, such that x constitutes an essence, so that $y=$ is freedom over and beyond the posited essence.

Significant as these similarities of structure across the elements are, however, the first part of *the Star* makes clear that what is affirmed or negated within each given element – the particular shade of “substantiality” and “action,” respectively – and hence that which is unified within each element is different.¹²⁰ Thus within the metaphysical God, the affirmation of that which is not-nothing – the pole of “substantiality” within God – emerges as God’s “unmoved infinite Being”, while it is “God’s freedom,” his divine “act,” that is born out of the original negation of the Nothing (SR, 28-29). Out of the nothing of the metalogical world, that which is affirmed as not-nothing – worldly “substantiality” – is the infinitely applicable presence of “logos” that holds the particulars of the world together as aggregate (SR, 43). And within this world, the manifold particulars themselves are the product of the continuous active negation of the nothing, insofar as “each New is a new negation of the Nothing, something never-been, a beginning for itself, [...] “something new under the sun” (SR, 45). Finally, in the metaethical human being, the affirmation of the not-nothing affirms the human being’s “character,” a form of substantial being which highlights just the human being’s “particularity as enduring essence,” irreducible to the universal, and rooted in the “transitory” (SR, 65). The negation of the nothing of the human being yields, finally, “the finitude of human freedom,” or “free will” (SR, 66–67).

Biodata

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¹¹⁸ Else Rahel-Freund, *op. cit.*, 92.

¹¹⁹ Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption*, 54.

¹²⁰ Benjamin Pollock, *op. cit.*, 159.