LANGUAGE AND JEWISH IDENTITY:
FRANZ ROSENZWEIG’S “NEW THINKING” AND THE
REVALORIZATION OF BIBLICAL SPEECH

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April 3, 2009
In 1916 Issac Husik, a historian of medieval Jewish philosophy, claimed: “There are Jews now and there are philosophers, but there are no Jewish philosophers and there is no Jewish Philosophy.” In contrast to his colleague Husik, Julius Guttman stressed that there existed a continuity between modern Jewish thought and medieval Jewish philosophy. In his well-known 1933 work *Die Philosophie des Judentums*, Guttman identified a philosophy of Judaism emerging in Biblical times and closing with the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen. In the subsequent 1951 Hebrew translation of his book Guttmann added a concluding chapter on the dialogical thought of Franz Rosenzweig, who he believed to be the last great philosopher of Judaism. Inspired by Rosenzweig’s dialogical philosophy, Guttman argued the following:

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2 This quote is the conclusion to the following, longer statement: “There have appeared philosophers among the Jews in succeeding centuries, but they are either philosophized without regard to Judaism and in opposition to its fundamental dogmas, thus incurring the wrath and exclusion of the synagogue, or they sought to disassociate Judaism from theoretical speculation on the ground that the Jewish religion is not a philosophy but a role of conduct. In more recent times Jewry has divided itself into sects and under the influence of modern individualism has lost its central authority making every group the arbiter of its own belief ceremony and communal activity of a practical character. There are Jews now and there are philosophers, but there are no Jewish philosophers and there is no Jewish Philosophy” (Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958], 431–32).

The Jewish people did not begin to philosophize because of an irresistible urge to do so. They received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of the successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view.4

Even though the rabbis of the Talmud may have followed what Baruch Spinoza would have determined to be an apostolic hermeneutic—that their undaunted assurance in the divinity of Torah informed their hermeneutical proclivities—most Jewish thinkers employed a dialogical hermeneutic by transforming and adapting foreign ideas, such as philosophy, into a Jewish Weltanschaung. Guttmann believed that Rosenzweig represented the culmination of this tradition.

As is already well known, throughout his short life Rosenzweig stubbornly pursued an Archemedian point at which an individual, subjective experience and a universal, objective one could be conjoined. Rosenzweig explored the lives and thoughts of Plato, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Nietzsche to test this idea.5 By the summer of 1909 Rosenzweig discovered that subjective experience, reality, and reason were only tenably conjoined through G. W. F. Hegel’s notion of “totality” (Allheit). In fact, as he wrote in a letter to his cousin Rudolf Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig hoped to write a book on German culture in the nineteenth century by focusing on Hegel’s achievement.6 To some extent Rosenzweig did this in his dissertation Hegel und der Staat. Yet as early as 1910 he no longer felt that Hegel’s notion of totality could persuasively conjoin abstract philosophical contemplation with actual historical experience.7


5 See Briefe und Tagebaucher, I, entries of 14 Dec 1905; 5, 7, 16, 24 Feb 1906; 22 May 1906; 24 June 1906; 16 July 1906; 22 May 1906; 11 Jan 1906; 19 Feb 1906; 16, 20, 26 March 1906; 4 Sep 1906; 11, 28 Jan 1906; 2 March 1906; a April 1906; 8 August 1906.

6 Briefe und Tagebucher I: 21 Dec 1909 to H. Erhenberg and Dec 1909 to W. Sohm and F. Frank.

7 By arguing that after the collapse of Hegel’s notion of totality, abstract philosophical contemplation and historical experience remained partitioned in the years between 1910–13, Rosenzweig still continued to find a way to affix temporality to eternity (See ibid., 12 Aug 1910; 1, 13 Sept 1910; 16, 20, 27 Aug 1910; 14 Feb 1911). By October 1913, Rosenzweig once again discovered a way to connect these two philosophical positions historically emulous of one another through his return to Judaism. For Rosenzweig, God in Judaism is able to relate to every single person continually in time, and yet this God transcends historical experience as the eternal Creator of time and space and navigates all events in historical experience to a final destination (See ibid., 31 Oct 1913; 1, 4 Nov 1913; 6, 11 Dec 1913; 14, 23, 26 June 1914; July 1914; 9 Oct 1914). Unfortunately, for Rosenzweig, this connection was short lived. On the one hand, between 1913–17, Rosenzweig did not, in fact, link Judaism to historical experience, and on the other, he understood the connection of Christianity to philosophy (after the 313 Edict of Constantine) as a task beyond immediate personal experience. Yet, as we know, he continued to search.
By 1913 Rosenzweig had experienced two forms of personal conversion: what Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz have characterized as his “dramatic volte-face from modern agnosticism to Offenbarungsgläubigkeit—faith based on revelation,”8 and his return to Judaism. As Rosenzweig later explained (in 1920) to his former Doktorvater, Professor Friedrich Meinecke, “cognition [Erkennen] no longer appears to me as an end in itself. It has turned to service, a service to human beings.”9 As is already quite famous, Rosenzweig discovered this service, a life of dialogue, through his relationship with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy.10 Rosenzweig’s numerous conversations with Rosenstock-Huessy led him to an irreversible Offenbarungsgläubigkeit, and Rosenzweig began to understand the trajectory of his life as precisely this movement from relativism and agnosticism in modern philosophy to religion steeped in revelation, which he accomplished by “making clear to [himself] the entire system of Jewish doctrine.”11 By becoming a pupil of Cohen the following year, in 1914, who incidentally had recently departed from his Chair at the University of Marburg to teach Jewish philosophy at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, Rosenzweig began to compose his thoughts on religion in general and Judaism in particular. In April of that year, Rosenzweig penned his essay “Atheistic Theology,” which berates trends in contemporary thought that belittle the role revelation plays in modern religious life. By late 1916, Rosenzweig seemed to have fully embraced Rosenstock-Huessy’s “revelation is orientation” as his “philosophical Archimedean point.”12 In his Urzelle to the Star of Redemption (his famous 1917 letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg), Rosenzweig explained how he finally could solve his life-long existential conundrum—by a new focus on revelation and Jewish renewal. As Rosenzweig explained in this letter, he only discovered a link through his discussions with Rosenstock-Huessy on the relationship between philosophy, Christianity, Judaism, and through his correspondence with Gertrud


11 Glatzer, 28.

Oppenheim on the dynamic within Judaism between personal experience and God’s revelation. This, of course, is the much-acclaimed backdrop for Rosenzweig’s Star.

It is unsurprising then that Guttmann would add Rosenzweig to the conversation in his history of the philosophy of Judaism. While I recognize the methodological problem in Guttmann’s work, that the title of his book *Philosophies of Judaism* implies the untenable position that Jewish philosophy is indeed a philosophy of Judaism, Rosenzweig does fit into Guttmann’s account of what is Jewish philosophy. By confirming a deep personal commitment to revelation through his relationship with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, long obfuscated by medieval metaphysics and rhetoric and by a scrupulous adherence to Halakhah, Rosenzweig, now committed to a more spontaneous religious sensibility, reflected exactly the process Guttmann described in how philosophy enters Jewish life and is transformed into “Jewish Philosophy.” By first focusing on Rosenzweig’s turn to language and his participation in the “New Thinking,” in this paper, I will examine how Rosenzweig discovered his philosophy of dialogue and philosophy of language through specifically non-Jewish conversations—especially through his relationship with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy—and then, as I will explain in the second part of the paper, he applied them to a specifically Jewish philosophical methodology in order to revalorize the biblical word, and how Jewish culture can be built through Jewish philosophical hermeneutics and a hermeneutics of citation.

II.1. Speech-Thinking as the “New Thinking”

II.1.1 Rosenzweig’s Response to Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his work *The Will to Power*, introduced the phrase “European Nihilism,” in order to describe what he felt to be the immanent cultural degeneration. For him, “nihilism stands at the door,” and subsequently asks, “whence

13 Rosenzweig adamantly maintained that his *Star* was not a philosophy of Judaism, rather it was system of philosophy that employed a “distinctly Jewish method” in order to ascertain an all-inclusive divine word. Rosenzweig followed Cohen in employing Jewish sources to his system of philosophy and, like Cohen, his conclusions were not at all parochial.
comes the uncanniest of all guests?"14 This "uncanniest of all guests," for Nietzsche, abused the German cultural paladin, Bildung, and that the expansive nature of humanistic knowledge in German thought led inexorably to a syncretistic confounding of all values. Nietzsche asserted that the animus beyond European nihilism was to reduce truth into value. For him, the “guest” aspired to diffuse current epistemological assertions ensconced in traditional metaphysical philosophy by advancing inquiries in contemporary disquisitions regarding, what Nietzsche’s guest felt to be, illusory truths such as the soul or a Divine creator and sustainer. During this undertaking, this “guest” would disclose his generation’s idiosyncratic delusions, by affirming the overall subjectivity of such epistemological, metaphysical allegations. The claim to ultimate truth, no less than any other human opinion or belief, is equally a subjective value, and due to its hubristic assertions, most likely a fallacy. By employing what would be Nietzsche’s guest’s philosophical methodology, metaphysics as a discipline resembles “the science that treats the fundamental errors of mankind—but does so as though they were fundamental truths.”15 Rather than reiterating commonplace slogans regarding the immutable essence of the natural world, human experience, or divine existence, what Nietzsche’s guest understood to be the facile desideratum of his inquiries was to manifest the cultural and ephemeral character of epistemology. Whether scientifically, or aesthetically, he indiscriminately aggressed all forms of rationality. He felt that the notions of reason and truth were disassociated with the tradition of European metaphysics. By evincing the persuasive ethos situated of all systems of thought, nihilism, the “uncanniest of all guests,” effectively reduced the backbone of European metaphysics—logic—to mere rhetoric. Any form of epistemology, then, for Nietzsche and his guest, is simply a disclosure of the will to power, and thus, any discrepancy between truth and falsity is invariably ersatz.16


16 Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann, "Twilight of the Idols: How One Philosophizes with a Hammer," in On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 314: “There is no reality, no ‘ideality’ that is touched in this essay. Not only eternal idols, also the youngest which are therefore feeblest on account of their age. ‘Modern ideas,’ for example. A great wind blows among the trees, and everywhere fruit falls down—truths. The squandering of an all-too-rich autumn: one stumbles over truths, one steps on and kills a few—there are too many. But what we get hold of is no longer anything questionable but rather decisions.”
Nietzsche, and subsequently Martin Heidegger, inaugurated what the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, described as the “adventure of difference” in philosophical thought. This adventure began by beclouding the divergence between reason and speculation, Sein and Dasein, and, of course, truth and falsehood, so that the immutable bedrock of “difference” (i.e. the Divine), both beyond and antecedent to language and reality, was ultimately abrogated. Once this bedrock of difference lost relevance, rational thought lost its principle underpinning, and the bedrock of difference was refashioned as a result of the will to power, or as Vattimo describes in hermeneutical terms, a will to interpret. The move from metaphysics to hermeneutics confined philosophical inquiry to the ambit of human experience and reason. All human experience, being woefully subjective, then, was reduced to interpretation. By reducing epistemology to axiology, Nietzsche’s uncanny guest jeopardized, not without irony, any future efforts to generate innovative philosophical schemes or to conceive of new foundations of thought, simply because of the subjectivity of human experience. The crisis of modernity emerged as a result of Nietzsche’s reduction. A generation of philosophers after Nietzsche was obliged to piece together a Weltanschauung from a world of conflicting, subjective interpretations.

While Rosenzweig did not afford Nietzsche a noticeable place in the Star, Nietzsche emerges, auspiciously, in the introductions to all three parts—three crucial moments in the text. Like many of his Weimar compatriots, Rosenzweig, incommoded by the overall carnage of World War I, aspired to rethink everything anew. Like Nietzsche, Rosenzweig’s initial desideration was to critically breakdown both epistemological as well as ontological conventions, so that he could radically inaugurate a cultural, philosophical and theological renewal. Karl Kraus’s Nietzsche, Nietzsche the apostate, provided for Rosenzweig the foundation for his overall rejection of Hegelian Idealism. By abdicating the value


18 Ibid., 49.

19 Ibid., 43.


of dogma and tradition, not only did Nietzsche affirm personal autonomy in way that Rosenzweig found amenable to his own project, but also provided Rosenzweig with an example of nihilism on the way to faith. Rosenzweig stressed that philosophy, for Nietzsche, emerged as the enduring characteristic of the philosopher. Previously, philosophy was unable to amalgamate with the philosopher—the life of the philosopher was divorced from his philosophy—yet Nietzsche strove towards valuing philosophy as one of the many characteristics of a philosopher.

While Rosenzweig did not share Kraus’s obsession with Nietzsche, he nevertheless responded assiduously to Nietzsche’s challenge. According to Rosenzweig, Nietzsche ameliorated his philosophical system by replacing the scientific, objective hermeneutical methodologies with the more ethical. In a somewhat radical move, Nietzsche placed the significance in philosophy not on the existing independent of time as a textus, but rather on the living person. The obvious consequence to such a scheme results in the recondite pursuit to explicate a philosopher’s identity through his biography. Also opposed to current “sterile” research atmosphere of his colleagues, Nietzsche, according to Rosenzweig, procured Schopenhauer’s subjective philosophical modus operandi, by popularizing a novel philosophic personality in his writings characterized by living a unique life. As a result, Rosenzweig argued that Nietzsche, during his own life, strived to meet the demands of several competing intellectual vocations: the poet, the saint, and the philosopher. To understand Nietzsche fully is to live his life, which is precisely how Rosenzweig himself wanted his work to be interpreted, as a temporal document written by a living person.

22 Star, 9.

23 Glatzer, 5: “You can’t build anything on Nietzsche, as you might on Goethe or nature. Who can possibly be a disciple of Nietzsche, base anything on him? He is neither a foundation, nor all-embracing as nature. He is a scaler of heights and therefore lonely. Who dares follow him? Who has enough conceit for that?”

24 Ibid., 81. August 22, 1918: F.R. struck by a sudden inspiration, began writing his Star of Redemption. August 27, 1918 to Gertrud Oppenheim:

“I am deeply involved in developing my letter [of November 1917] to Rudi [Rudolf Ehrenberg] into a book. It’s going to be quite fantastic, entirely unpublishable, equally scandalous to ‘Christians, Jews and heathens’—but I’ll learn what I need to learn in the process, and that’s enough. For the present … the introduction. I’ll probably write to you again tomorrow. I just noticed that I am sending you this insolent announcement of my system on Hegel’s birthday. It’s a pity about him! Only Nietzsche (and Kant) pass muster!”

25 The Saint lives life, the poet muses over it, and the philosopher systematizes it.

Rosenzweig, canonized death’s struggle to escape from itself that prompted Nietzsche to replace this moribund systematized goal of philosophy with the so-called “lived philosopher.”

Rosenzweig’s eschewal of Hegelian idealism was in some sense predicated on Nietzsche’s critique of the current paralysis gripping historicist ideology and academic scholarship. And while Rosenzweig commended Nietzsche for his philosophical endorsement of subjectivity and personal experience, Rosenzweig fulminated against Nietzsche’s break with abstract idealism—Hegelianism—not for having done so, but rather for having done so the wrong way. Nietzsche’s move, for Rosenzweig, was indeed pagan, and however admirable, remained subjacent to Goethe’s pagan disposition—yet, Rosenzweig maintained that the entire pagan preference, whether by Nietzsche or Goethe, could not match the theological prevalence disclosed in revelation—endorsed by both the Christian and Jew. In fact, this move also represented for Rosenzweig the shortcoming of nineteenth-century theology.

This shortcoming, for Rosenzweig, was not that it was predicated on religious experience as some scholars have suggested, rather that this form of theology interpreted the hegemony of miracles incredulously. In the Star, Rosenzweig wrote:

Miracle is substantially a “sign.” In a wholly miraculous world, wholly without law, an enchanted world, so to speak, it is true—and has already been remarked—that the individual miracle could hardly strike one as a miracle. It attracts attention by virtue of its predictedness, not of its unusualness. The latter is not its nucleus but only its “makeup,” though as such often highly necessary for its effectiveness. The miracle is that a man succeeds in lifting the veil which commonly hangs over the future, not that he suspends predestination. Miracle and prophecy belong together.

Any empirical, worldly event that insinuates divine involvement, for Rosenzweig, is construed as a miracle. By characterizing this event as a miracle, Rosenzweig emblazoned the correlation between the empirical, worldly

27 Briefe, 469: “Aber hinter jedem Paradoxon Kierkegaards spürt man biographische Absurda—and deshalb muß man ihm credere.”

28 Glatzer, 7: “Not to think about thinking! Not to doubt one’s doubt! Nietzsche’s method: distrust and skepticism. Goethe’s method: wonder and scrutiny.”


30 Star, 95.
existence perceived in time and God's existence beyond time, as an augury of God's impending kingdom. Miracles afford Rosenzweig the hermeneutical a priori for the event of revelation—without miracles, revelation seems bereft of any substance. Rather than replacing the nineteenth-century notion of theology and of religious experience, Rosenzweig would rather restore the hermeneutical import of miracles, so that he may regenerate, for his generation, the medieval penchant for revelation. Since language for Rosenzweig reconciles the alterity steeped in revelation and the empirical world, he analyzed a notion of language in his 1925 essay the "New Thinking."

II.1.2 Language and the New Thinking

Before Rosenzweig, with Buber, began to translate the Bible and after reading several reviews of the Star, as well responding to numerous letters regarding it, Rosenzweig discovered that his audience was misreading his Star of Redemption. In the "New Thinking" essay, Rosenzweig sought out to remedy what he felt to be a rather unfortunate philosophical imbroglio. By abnegating the convenience of the abstract philosophical contemplation prevailing in contemporary academic discussions of philosophy, in this essay, Rosenzweig proposed a seemingly non-philosophical approach—"Speech thinking." Here, Rosenzweig decisively untangled those unfortunate misunderstandings by gently explaining that, in the Star, he employed the relatively new method of this speech thinking. Simply put, Rosenzweig wanted to comprehend the word, in conversation, interposed between people, that, in human speech, arouses the "self," the "I" in one's Mitmensch. Love, discovered in this dialogue, then, for Rosenzweig, transcends a simple simile or metaphor. Furthermore, in the ambit of the human, divine dialogue, Rosenzweig ascribed word, speech, and language as

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10 Rosenzweig literally juxtaposed philosophy with Speech-thinking. He wrote: "In actual conservation, something happens; I do not know in advance what the other will say to me because I myself do not even know what I am going to say; perhaps not even whether I am going to say anything at all; it could well be that the other begins, indeed, most often this is how it will be in genuine conversation, as one can easily be convinced by a comparative glance at the Gospels and Socratic dialogues; Socrates is usually first to get the conversation on its way—that is, on the way of a philosophical discussion. The thinker knows exactly his thoughts in advance; that he 'expresses' them is only a concession to the deficiency of our, as he calls it, communicative medium, which does not consist in the fact that we need language, but rather that we need time. To need time means: being able to anticipate nothing, having to wait for everything, being dependent on the other for one's own. All that is completely unthinkable to the thinking thinker, while it corresponds uniquely to the language thinker. Language thinker—for of course the new, speaking thinking is thinking, just as much as the old, thinking did not occur without inner speech; the difference between old and new, logical and grammatical thinking does not rest on loud versus quiet, but rather on needing the other, and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously" ("The New Thinking," 126–27).
the sole means for ascertaining the divine. In this dialogue, God awakens the “Self,” the “I,” in the person, through love, disclosed in revelation and the person, in turn, speaks to God through the language of prayer.

Deeply ensconced within his early audience existed, for Rosenzweig, a modest number of thinkers who "could have written the [Star] just as well or even better than [him]." For him, these thinkers included the editors of Die Kreatur the Catholic Joseph Wittig, the Jew Martin Buber, and the Protestant Victor Freiherr von Weizsächer, as well as frequent contributors such Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, Karl Barth, Leo Weismantel, Werner Picht, Nicholas Berdyaev, and, of course, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. While Rosenzweig, in the “New Thinking,” was not exclusively addressing his confreres, he manifestly acknowledged their commitment, especially in aftermath of the First World War, toward the revalorizing and cultivating a new philosophical methodology committed to the renewal of speech and language. As one scholar discovered, discussions about this new speech-thinking philosophy emerged years before Rosenzweig’s Star had been published, in groups such as the Patmos Circle, founded by Rosenzweig with Rosenstock-Huessy.

Established during the First World War, members of this intellectual society shared the current eschatological sentiment found in contemporary works such as Oswald Spengler’s Der Untergang des Abendlandes (1918), Theodor Lessing’s Geschichte als Sinnegebung des Sinnlosen (1919), Karl Kraus’ Die letzten Tage der Menschheit (1926) and Edmond Husserl’s Die Kritis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie (1936). By opining that the entirety of human civilization was on the threshold of an unfathomable catastrophe, the members of the Patmos circle looked toward John the Theologian for council. They emphasized John’s interpretation of the Logos, where he argued that the word fundamentally was required to be both spiritually and corporeally renewed through the each and every speech-act. They canvassed the world apocalyptically and argued that, as


34 Ibid., 121–24.

35 For Spengler’s influence on Rosenzweig, see Franz Rosenzweig, ed. Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer, Die Grüthi-Briefe: Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy (Tübingen: Bilam Verlag, 2002). See his letters to Margrit on 5 February 1919 (228); 28 March 1919 (263–64); 6 April 1919 (274); 30 April 1919 (287); 2 May 1919 (290); 5 May 1919 (295).

36 He is also known as John of Patmos.
children of the Creator, human beings bear the awesome and ineluctable responsibility to nurture and assist one’s fellow as well as that for all of God’s creation. Otherwise, humanity will be doomed to endure its own calamitous and woeful fallout. Fascinated with John’s reverie and his passion for the coming Age of the Spirit, members of the Patmos circle interpreted this age as one where creation would return to its ambrosial splendor, where a true human community could develop and expand, and where all of humanity would be united in the Spirit and the Logos. While certainly both Christian and Jew yearn for such a time, according to the Patmos circle, this time in human history will be a period where Christians and Jews will look beyond their particular idiosyncrasies, simply because they will feel rather enfeebled as a mere Christian or Jew.

By turning to language, Rosenzweig, along with his confreres in the Patmos circle, not only consciously challenged, what he felt to be, the banal efforts of formalist reason, as well as that the exclusively of inward experience, but also, through his attention to spoken speech and textual hermeneutics, he hoped to look beyond simple philosophical attitudes regarding language. By placing unqualified import on the significance of language, Rosenzweig was not simply confuting idealism’s penchant toward abstract philosophical contemplation, he was also challenging his generations eschewal of language. Many philosophers concurred with Henri Bergson’s observation in his Creative Evolution (1907) that language was, in fact, malapropos to deal with the ephemeral quality and exertive continuity of reality. Despite the emergence of hermeneutics at this time from thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), they still tended to explain language linguistically. Endorsing the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), philosophers conceived of language simply as a system of differences. The process of continually collating the various units of language, argued

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37 In a letter addressed to Rosenzweig and dated 19 July 1916, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy took issue with Goethe’s datum that in the beginning was the deed, not the word. Briefe, 649: “Unsere Wege sind ja wohl aneinander vorbeigegangen. Was Sie aufgeben, suche ich, was Sie suchen, war bei mir im Anfang. In principio erat verbum, und so lang war die Verwirrung. Und wie das Wort Fleisch wird, wird es auch Licht von oben. Statt dessen ist diese Goethesche Froschperspektive: im Anfang war die Tat, os ohne alle Gestirne, mithin ein ebenso endliches, maß—und gewichtaltes, aber auch entsetzlich sachlich-objektives, entseeltes System.”

38 See John 1: 1–14.

Saussure, was the constituent feature of language that defined its overall identity.\(^{40}\) By signifying this variance, Saussure ignored the distinct form or content of language and focused on the ephemeral character of the linguistic sign, since, for him, language was simply a system of signs.\(^{41}\) Yet, for Rosenzweig, this linguistic sign continuously asseverates reality—the lived moment. By persistently and continually renewing itself in the present tense, Rosenzweig argued that the linguistic sign reaffirms the world of lived experience. The linguistic sign, for him, comprises the very lived-experience, the very reality it circumscribes: “The world is never without the word. Indeed, it only exists in the world, and without the word there would be no world.”\(^{42}\) Linguistically speaking, Rosenzweig could not unambiguously demarcate any disaccord between the terms “language” and “speech,” since the corresponding German word Sprache embodies both. Yet, he still was able to deftly and subtly differentiate between these two contexts. True speech, for Rosenzweig, which can be either spoken or written, must address a specific person in a specific time and place. Rather than focusing on a system of difference in language and speech, Rosenzweig relegated speech to a conjoint human activity. He resolved any divergence emerging in language through translation, since, for him, people aspire to listen and speak, so that they may successfully address the other in their quest, translate the other’s language into one’s own, on their way to an ecumenical and all-inclusive peace among all inhabitants of this world—which Rosenzweig identified as the one true language of humanity.

Throughout his work, Rosenzweig singled out the importance of language. Unsurprisingly Rosenzweig employed Nietzsche’s Lebensphilosophie by ascribing language, in all three parts of his Star, to biographical categories.\(^{43}\) Rosenzweig strove to confute what he understood as Hegel’s steadfast penchant toward abstract philosophical contemplation over figurative reasoning—the image of man as Geist—and Hegel’s overall supposition that abstract


\(^{41}\) By conjoining the signifier (the form) with the signified (the meaning), the sign (the word), for Saussure, emerges as a mere convention, not as some natural correlation. Language does not impart names for categories existing beyond itself. Saussure argued that if words corresponded to antecedent concepts, they would mean the same thing in all languages which, for him, is untenable. He maintained that each language is simply a system of concepts that systematize the empirical world.

\(^{42}\) *Star*, 295.

thought ultimately was not only the antecedent to, but also fashioned, reality. For Rosenzweig, language precedes thought, in fact, he excogitated whether abstract thought could indeed endure without language. As the bedrock of thought, language constructs the human being’s intellectual universe: as the person communicates through speech, his or her ruminations ensue. Language itself antecedes thought and, for Rosenzweig, the individual becomes human through speech and also through the disclosure of his or her name.

For Rosenzweig, a person’s first and last name bespeaks his or her overall particularity and exhibits a phenomenon that genuinely escapes general empirical explication. By almost paraphrasing his self-proclaimed mentor, the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen, Rosenzweig argued that a person’s particularity can only be affirmed in another person (the Other)—a “correlation” between an I-Thou. In this encounter, a person’s name signifies his particularity. A name, for Rosenzweig, “lays claim to the present by confronting man with a future. It always bears with it dream and desires,” and cannot be reduced to “an imitation of the real, as the logician claims; a name is not given accidentally, nor is it merely an act of convention.” The logician, according to Rosenzweig, applies a name, so that he may categorize and systematize an object in the empirical, natural world. However, the logician neglects an existential characteristic imputed on to the “name”—that the “name” requires the person “to call and to confess: I believe it.” The name is ascribed a theological component. For Rosenzweig, hearing and responding to your name is life-transforming moment.

In the Bible, when God called to Adam, he was crestfallen as a result of his sin and remained in silence. Rosenzweig construed the second call to Adam, “Where are Thou?” as really a question of “where is your own self”—assuredly God knew where to find him. Adam, according to Rosenzweig, acted diffidently and, thus, could not meet God. Yet, in a similar incident in the Hebrew Bible, God calls to Abraham, but contrary to Adam, he answers, “Here I am,” with a profound exigency. Abraham’s answer, for Rosenzweig, not only denoted an unremitting devotion to his caller, God, but demonstrated the necessary acumen to navigate and to identify oneself in relation to God and the world. In this moment, Abraham discovered himself, his “self.” By responding to God’s call, Abraham became an “I,” a “self,”

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45 See: Star, 188.
and thus discovered his "self." Abraham, according to Rosenzweig, was incapable of subjugating his response, and his response resisted any attempt to reduce it to a general principle. Abraham, like all people, is circumscribed to the present moment, and cannot fully prepare for genuine dialogue.

So, language, for Rosenzweig, eventually succumbs to a dialogical impasse: language has the capacity to both isolate individuals from and bring into relation with their Mitmenschen. To resolve this problem Rosenzweig employed a hermeneutical methodology to his reading of the Book of Psalms consonant to his description of the revelatory speech of revelation as affirmed in the Song of Songs. Rosenzweig's reading of Psalm 115 is crucial to his application of Speech-Thinking on speech in general. He applied his notion of biblical hermeneutics, so that he could develop an ontology of language. During the pilgrim festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot, Jews conventionally chant the "Great Hallel," Psalms (113–18) and, according to Rosenzweig, these psalms are inaugurated by a series of songs of praise that emerge towards the end as a series of transcendent songs. For Rosenzweig, the 'we’ and the polyphonic incantation of exaltation correspond to the speech of redemption. Only Psalm 115, according to Rosenzweig’s reading of the Psalms, begins and ends with "a mighty and emphatic We." Rosenzweig argued as long as the community continues to employ the term “we,” redemption will remain an asymptotic endeavor. Eliciting Schopenhauer’s famously ominous Stimmung, Rosenzweig opined that every “we” uttered implies a “they”—dialogical existence is, thus, necessarily elusive. Not just heuristically, but as a form of pedagogy, argued Rosenzweig, does the above quandary serve as a necessary propaedeutic towards the next segment of redemption, that of silence. Redemption, however, does not surcease in silence of the community, but rather in the silencing of God. For Rosenzweig, "God himself must speak the ultimate word which may

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46 Star, 251.

47 Ibid., 253: Rosenzweig writes: “The conquering But—‘But we are eternal’—this our great master [Hermann Cohen] proclaimed as the final conclusion of his wisdom, when for the last time before many, he spoke of the relationship between his We and his world. The We are eternal; death plunges into the Nought of this triumphal shout of eternity. Life becomes immortal in redemption’s eternal hymn of praise.”

48 See Arthur Schopenhauer, trans. E. F. J. Payne, The World as Will and Representation (Indian Hills, Col.: Falcon’s Wing Press, 1958), 6: “That other being, whose object I am now considering my person to be, is not absolutely the subject but is in the first instance a knowing individual. Therefore, if he too did not exist, in fact, even if there existed in general no other knowing being except myself, this would still by no means be the elimination of the subject in whose representation alone all objects exists. For I myself am in fact that subject, just as is every knowing being.” All existence, for Schopenhauer is based in opposition—his existence negates someone else.
no longer be a word."49 This moment, for him, characterizes a world facilely singing the paean to its own existence. In contrast to the linguistic account of signified and signifiers, language in the world and existence at this moment, for Rosenzweig, by emerging as a speaking language, transforms into a canticle praising both the world and the creator of that world, in whom, we discover our “self.” In this move from redemption to silence, Rosenzweig argued that Speech-thinking venerates speech and time sufficiently to accede the manifest ontology of silence.

In eternity the spoken word fades away into the silence of perfect togetherness—for union occurs in silence only; the word unites, but those who are united fall silent. And so liturgy, the reflector which focuses the sunbeams of eternity n the small circle of the year, must introduce man to this silence. But even in liturgy, shared silence can come only at the end, and all that goes before is a preparation for this end. In the stage of preparation the word still dominates the scene. The word itself must take man to the point of learning how to share silence. His preparation begins with learning how to hear.50

By emphasizing the course from speech to silence, Rosenzweig placed the poetic into the realm of the ethical.51

Rosenzweig, in this move, understood language and poetry as coterminous:

To be used thus, however, poetry itself would first have to learn silence, for in the word it is still tied to the soul. It would have to learn to free itself of the concept of a configuration already present in the world. It would itself have to bring forward a configuration; it would have to become gesture. For only gesture is beyond word and deed-not, to be sure, the gesture which attempts to say something—for this would be but a pitiful substitute for discourse, a mere stuttering, nor that gesture which only seeks to elicit action on another’s part, for this would be a pitiful substitute for one’s own deed, but that gesture which has become wholly free, wholly creative, and which is no longer directed at this or that person or thing, a gesture which perfects a man wholly for Being, for his humanness and thereby for humanity. For wherever man expresses himself wholly in gesture, there the space separating man from man falls away in a ‘wonderfully still’ empathy. There the word may evaporate which had tumbled headlong into this decisive interval in order to fill it with its own body and thus to become a bridge between man and man by its own heroic self-sacrifice. Thus gesture perfects man for his full humanity.52

49 Star, 238.

50 Ibid., 308–9.

51 Star, 371: “The element in which poetry moves is the idea, and as conception, the idea unites in itself the spatiality of the perceptual and the temporality of feeling, and turns them into one whole. Poetry’s content is the world as a Whole, and its little god, man the microcosm. And thus poetry might be expected to supply man with the mood for finding his way to that ultimate redemptive silence which should have appeared to him in the secular festivals of redemption at least as prospect and promise.”

52 Ibid., 371–72.
By situating “gesture and silence” above “word and speech,” Rosenzweig reiterated that poetry is coterminous with presence, thus with truth. Poetry, for him, transcends the mere composing of a poetic verse and he expatiated a notion of poetry that involved a scrupulous technique of listening beyond the spoken word. Speaking poetically, for Rosenzweig, employs not only un-solecistic language and bewitching vocabulary, but also restores the impetuous and ephemeral word that delimited itself beyond itself. Poetry, Rosenzweig asserted, through the medium of language and the word, as well as in its absence, initiates a convergence of both religious and aesthetic experience.

Rosenzweig did not want to confound gesture and deed, since they were, for him, not coterminous. By differentiating itself from both deed and language, gesture cogently portrays the requisite efficacy to persevere in time. Nonetheless, all language, for Rosenzweig, contains either a sign or a gesture. Even though one continually responds to language, the linguistic sign itself, for Rosenzweig, remains unanswered, since one does not respond to a linguistic sign, rather the one awaits the gesture. Yet, both the gesture and the sign, for him, in some sense remain in silence. It is in this silence that the truth of both speech and the name is discovered.

In the name and its revelation there is consummated that delivery of revelation which has commenced with creation. Whatever happens thereafter, happens “in the name.” Sanctification of the name or desecration of the name—since revelation there is no deed which does not bring about one or the other. The process of redemption in the world takes place in the name and for the sake of the name. The end, however, is nameless; it is above any name. The very sanctification of the name occurs only so that the name might one day be muted. Beyond the word—and what is name but the collective word—beyond the word there shine silence. There where no other names any longer confront the one and acknowledges him and him alone, there the act of sanctification has come to rest. For sanctity is meaningful only where there is still profanity. Where everything is sacrosanct, there the Sacred itself is no longer sacred, there it simply exists. This simple existence of the Highest, such unimpaired reality, omnipotent and solely potent, beyond any desire for or joy in realization, this is truth. For truth is not to be recognized through error, as the masters of the school think. Truth attests itself; it is one with everything real; it does not part in it.53

53 Star, 383–84.
By persevering in silence, the Jew, for Rosenzweig, remains at the essence of language—that is to say, the Jew is wary of how the other peoples of the world fashion language as an extension of their identity. As a result of Galut, Jews had unparalleled access to all languages, yet they did not possess a language in the same way other nations did so, since Jews, for Rosenzweig, are, in itself, language, as well as the name. Each generation of Jews, he averred, attests to the name. By correlating the contiguity of Jewish experience to that of the contiguity of silence as a means of attesting the name in silence, Rosenzweig demonstrates how such a process eludes philosophical and dialectical explication. In the Star, Rosenzweig explained how to experience silence as the essence of language, by claiming that the silence experienced is,

… unlike the muteness of the protocosmos, which had no words yet, here is a silence which no longer has any need of the word. It is the silence of consummate understanding. One glance says everything here. Nothing shows so clearly that the world is unredeemed as the diversity of languages. Between men who speak a common language, a glance would suffice for reaching an understanding; just because they speak a common language, they are elevated above speech. Between different languages, however, only the stammering word mediates, and gesture ceases to be immediately intelligible as it had been in the mute glance of the eye. It is reduced to a halting sign language, that miserable surrogate for communication. As a result, the supreme component in liturgy is not the common word but the common gesture. Liturgy frees gesture from the fetters of helpless servitude to speech, and makes of it something more than speech. Only liturgical gesture anticipates that “purified” lip which is promised for “that day” to the peoples ever divided as to language. In it, the impoverished muteness of the disbelieving members becomes eloquent, the voluble loquacity of the believing heart becomes silent. Disbelief and belief unite their prayer.54

To be silent, for Rosenzweig, is not coterminous with being mute. While Judaism perseveres in silence, Christianity, ironically because of its fecundity and eloquence, is mute. By corresponding the experience of silence to language, Rosenzweig argued that the “diversity of language” delineates the course from the proto-cosmic mutism to a worldly silence. Rosenzweig allotted silence, a theosophy of silence, as the apex of his dialogical thought. Speech requires collaboration from two partners, thus the alacrity to hear is as important as the genuine importunity to speak. For Rosenzweig, this relationship, then, consummated in silence, has the ability to impugn even a poet’s elocution.

54 Star, 295–96.
By beclouding aesthetics with metaphysics, Rosenzweig locates in poetry a place where space and time can coexist. In his theory of art, Rosenzweig examined poetry and the discovery of language. As the paragon for art, according to Rosenzweig, poetry emulates life more adequately than visual art or music because it relies exclusively on the language of life itself in order to successfully describe clairvoyance: “for the element in which it exists is the same as that in which life too spends most of its time: life too more often speaks the prosaic language of thought than the exalted language of song and pictorial gesture.” For Rosenzweig, unlike in revelation, which is disclosed through language, art cannot guarantee thought in the world. Yet, art, Rosenzweig maintained, can, in some sense, relate to language. Similar to the algebraic symbols of logic comprising the proto-cosmos, art anticipates language. Interestingly, by administering Immanuel Kant’s conundrum in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the “purpose without a purpose,” Rosenzweig attempted to decipher it by transposing it. Because the German idealists solved this conundrum with art, Rosenzweig, in his effort to confute them, replaced it with language. Art, for him, is simply language without speech. Art has to ability to communicate a common message to those who view it, but they cannot respond to it through speech. On the opposite end, revelation, for Rosenzweig, is the event where speech occurs. Revelation, then, can affirm the common message communicated through art, through speech. Art cannot truly anticipate language deliberately. It anticipates language only when it subsequently emerges. The place of art, for Rosenzweig, is an oxymoron, since it exists in a transposed relation to language. This place for art, according to Rosenzweig, is

a world of tacit accord which is no world at all, no real, vital, back-and-forth interconnection of address passing to and fro and yet, at any point, capable of being vitalized for moments at a time. No sound punctures this silence and yet at every instant each and everyone can sense the innermost part of the other in himself. It is the equality of the human which, prior to any real unity of the human, here becomes effective as content of the work of art. Prior to any real human speech, art creates, as the speech of the unspeakable, a first, speechless, mutual comprehension, for all time indispensable

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55 *Star*, 245: "By its very nature, of course, poetry stands in closer relationship to his quality of the 'Dramatic' than either art or music. This is because art, being at home in space, developed 'in breadth,' tended, that is, toward the 'Epic' of its own accord, and music, because in time, tended toward 'lyric' emphasis and sentient fulfillment of the individual moment. Poetry, on the other hand, is directly at home neither in space nor in time, but the common inner source of both space and time, in conceptual thought."

56 Ibid., 248.

beneath and beside actual speech. The silence of the tragic hero is silent in all art and is understood without any words. The self does not speak and yet it is heard. The self is perceived. The pure speechless glance completes every beholder the introversion into its own interior. Art is not the real world, for the threads which are drawn from man to man in it run only in moments, only for the short moments of the immediate glance and only at the place of the glance. The self does not become alive by being perceived. The life aroused in the beholder does not arouse the beheld to life; it all at once turns inward in the beholder himself. The realm of art provides the ground on which the self can grow up everywhere, but each self is in turn a wholly solitary, individual self; art nowhere creates a real plurality of selves, although it produces the possibility for the awakening of selves everywhere: the self that awakes nevertheless only knows of itself. In the make-believe world of art, in other words, the self ever remains self, never becomes—soul.58

By continually abiding to its own rules, art, for Rosenzweig, portrays the mythical reality that affirms the circumscribed accord of the meta-logical world. He argued that the underlying element of the artwork, antecedent to language, is what allows it to be the paradigm for mute reality. Art is simply aesthetic. It resides in a mythical reality that allows it to be beautiful—a plastic world, with its circumscribed reality. Art, then, for Rosenzweig, signifies a unity, although a circumscribed one, residing in a space between the totality (Allheit) ensconced in German idealism and an empyrean totality of truth. Peripheral to language, art, for Rosenzweig, signifies the world of silence. Since he argued that silence is the language of the self prior to language, the self is “what is condemned to silence in man and yet is everywhere and at once understood.”59 By viewing art, the self of the observer arouses him to recognize his own self. Rosenzweig believed that art, in some sense, can be a form of meditation that empowers a self, enclosed upon itself, to enliven yet another self, which still remains in solitude. Since art allows the beholder to recognize in him or herself an awareness of his or her own condition, it, for Rosenzweig, tragically arouses a sense in the beholder an awareness of his or her own solitude. Unlike with language, art is unable to truly communicate, and yet, art is unquestionably able to enliven the self to discover itself – it is a communication from silence to silence. Art, for Rosenzweig, is a transient reality situated on the

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58 Star, 81.

59 Star, 80.
threshold of existence, which is continually ready to enliven the self.\footnote{By referring to Aeschylus, Rosenzweig writes: “The silence of the tragic hero is silent in all art and is understood in all art without any words. The self does not speak and yet is heard. The self is perceived. The pure speechless glance completes in every beholder the introversion into its own interior. Art is not a real world, for the threads which are drawn from man to man in it run only for moments, only for the short moments of the immediate glance and only at the place of the glance. The self does not come alive by being perceived. The life of aroused in the beholder does not arouse the beheld to life; it at once turns inward in the beholder himself. The realm of art provides the ground on which the self can grow up everywhere; but each self is in turn a wholly solitary, individual self; art nowhere creates a real plurality of selves, although it produces the possibility for the awakening of selves everywhere: the self that awakens nevertheless only knows of itself. In the make-believe world of art, in other words, the self ever remains self, never becomes—soul” (Star, 81).} This self, enclosed upon itself, for Rosenzweig, can arouse a sense of humanity, even though it is not shared with others. Art is self-contained.

Poetry, on the other hand, as we have seen, has a different effect. Yet, according to Rosenzweig, the ability of poetry to engender simultaneously time and space is accordant to all literature. The characteristic of sonority in poetry, however, evinces what is its unique disposition in written form. Poetry, for Rosenzweig, has the remarkable ability to amalgamate phonetic, rhythmic, metric form in a way that the aggregate result endues with unqualified uniqueness. Rosenzweig also ennobled sonority to a demiurgic type of awareness, akin to that of the self at the moment of revelation. Poetry, in this sense, bespeaks the transcendence of language. So, as the bridge that traverses the chasm between philosophy and theology, the “New Thinking,” for Rosenzweig, emerges as a philosophical methodology that demands a theological interpretation.\footnote{See Star, 108: “… philosophy becomes a prognostication of philosophy, in a manner of speaking the ‘Old Testament’ of theology.”} Whether through a philosophical disquisition, or through the various forms of academic discourse, any effort to ascertain or demarcate the philosophical methodology at work in Rosenzweig’s notion of Speech-thinking, engages, in some sense, in its modus operandi. Rosenzweig argued that all efforts to define his system, a system that, for him, eludes any form of systematization, undermines his reliance on the spontaneity of the speech act—operating within a capricious world where speech is disclosed through actual life. Abstract philosophical contemplation alone, for Rosenzweig, is woefully inadequate to contrive such spontaneity—it, thus, beseeches a theological reality for assistance.

Yet, language for Rosenzweig, cannot fully chronicle reality. Even though he espoused religious experience as an unequivocally universal event, as the experience of revelation, language is still bereft of the necessary acumen to expound on the effects of this experience, yet dialectically, both this experience and language are concomitant.\footnote{By}
asserting that all speech-acts are revelations of the undisclosed “self,” Rosenzweig did not mean that all uses of language actually characterize and define speech. In fact, Rosenzweig differentiated between speech and unspoken language. However, true speech, for him is the “speech of the soul in which human inwardness reveals itself.” By applying the notion of Speech-Thinking to his philosophical methodology in the Star, Rosenzweig relegated the acquisition of belief outside the pale of abstract philosophical contemplation in favor of temporal existence:

Thus the new thinking’s method originates out of its temporality. To be sure, this is the case in all three books, yet it is most visible in the core book of this volume and thus of the whole, in the second book, the book of the present revelation. Into the place of the method of thinking, as all previous philosophy developed it, steps the method of speaking, Thinking is timeless and wants to be; it wants to establish a thousand connections with one blow; the ultimate, the goal, is for it the first. Speaking is time-bound, time-nourished; it neither can nor will abandon this, its nourishing environment; it does not know in advance where it will arrive; it lets its cues be given by others. It lives in general from the life of the other, whether the audience of the narration or the respondent in the dialogue or the co-speaker in a chorus; whereas thinking is always solitary, even if it is happening among several ‘symphilosophizing’ partners: even then, the other merely raises objections which I myself would really have to raise—which is the reason why most philosophical dialogues, including most of Plato’s, are so boring.63

Consequently then, Rosenzweig canvassed a world disclosed only through language. For him, language does not simply convey abstract thought, rather it is the organon of existence. With unfaltering alacrity, language manifests itself temporally and through relations with the Other. In this essay, Rosenzweig also maintained that there exists in language an incipient stage antecedent to its procurement of grammar. Language, as the disclosure of existence and reality, denotes not only the most elementary stratum of personal experience in the world, that of affirmation and negation, but also perceives them conjointly. Even from its very emergence, language appears recondite, yet by affirming and negating itself, language fashions these counterparts as a living reality evinced by a third stratum, the conjunction and. By conjoining affirmation and negation, this conjunction and fastidiously portrays the living disposition of reality. Because of

62 By circumscribing the potentiality of human language and culture in pt. 2 of the Star, Rosenzweig affirmed the urgency to respond to the divine. In this section, Rosenzweig established a sociological methodology in order to assess the success of various religious traditions. For Rosenzweig, Judaism and Christianity, although in different ways, succeed while Islam does not. According to Rosenzweig, Islam falls short because its theology is incapable of determining the limitations of its theological and philosophical hermeneutics. The problem of Islamic theology, as Rosenzweig argued, is that it refuses to appreciate religious texts as linguistically assisting the life of the divine; rather it delimits it as the overall divine presence.

its inability to simultaneously perceive its perspicuity during its nascent period while discerning an already multifarious and dynamic lived-reality, belief, Rosenzweig steadfastly maintained, should not be reduced merely to the concomitance of two rudimentary stratum. Rather, he argued, the primordial sapience of human beings, of the world and of the divine should continually be the vital component to experience, bespeaking the initial forms of experience and of life itself. Rosenzweig maintained that this conjunction, manifest in God and the world (creation), God and the individual (revelation), the individual and the world (redemption), simultaneously affirm and transcend the elements that form existence, even though they remain in continual tension with one another.

Despite this focus on language, Rosenzweig did not delineate systematically his philosophical methodology in the Star. Rather, as he explained in the “New Thinking,” Rosenzweig employed his non-systematic speech-thinking from the very beginning and narrated his philosophy as a form of “story telling.” Rosenzweig argued that Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), in his The Ages of the World “prophesied a narrative philosophy,” and Rosenzweig asserted that he wrote the second part of his Star, so that he could affirm Schelling’s methodological prophesy. Viewed temporally and as a form of narration or, indeed as story-telling, the Star, for Rosenzweig, was divided into the three forms of a story: the first part is the beginning, the second part is the actual story, and the third part, is the eschatological, yet heavenly “happily ever after.” Contrary to aspirations of the idealist philosopher, Rosenzweig did not expect to ascertain what is disclosed in the world or what, in fact, is the world, rather he assiduously narrated the “story of the world.”

And now this great world-poem is retold in three tenses. However, it is really narrated in the first book alone, the past of the past. In the present, the narration gives way to immediate exchange of speech, because what is present, whether human beings or God, cannot be spoken of in the third person; they can only be listened to and addressed. And in the book of the future, the language of the chorus governs, for the future seizes even the individual only where and when it can say We.

64 “New Thinking,” 121.
65 See: Glatzer, 341-44.
By identifying the dialogue, the choir, and the narrative, in the Star, as well as the temporal language of world, the language of revelation, and the language of negation, Rosenzweig demarcated three categories of language, so that he could employ a new, temporal philosophical methodology in order to manifest his notion of biblical hermeneutics. Rosenzweig, in a narrative form, inaugurated his philosophy with a cast of characters who remain crucial from beginning to end. In part two of the Star “the book of the present revelation…in the place of the method of thinking, as all previous philosophy developed it, steps the method of thinking.” By emphasizing the temporality of the Star, while adducing it as a system of philosophy, Rosenzweig, through his method of Speech-thinking, hoped to narrate a philosophical and discursive account of the world. This method could be, for Rosenzweig, indeed, correlated with the narrative method associated with the Bible which could not be surmised as the mere story-telling discovered in novels, nor as a epic form of narration, not even within the framework of anecdotes. Along with Marin Buber, Rosenzweig maintained that the Bible, regardless of the multiple genres disclosed within it, should appear to the reader (or listener) dialogically—as an encounter between the person and God, even though the narrative itself, as a genre, struggles significantly to portray itself in this fashion. Ensconced within the Bible, what both Rosenzweig and Buber designated as the three biblical genres—the legal caustic, the lyric of the psalms, and prophetic/eschatological rhetoric—is a phonated and unwritten dialogical disposition, which, discordant to the narrative form cannot be, … transformed as works of art to the objects of “pure pleasure,” and to lose in that transformation their high seriousness and their connection to the real world. Writing drapes them only lightly; when the Psalms are spoken in prayer, when the laws are followed, when the prophecies are believed, they lose immediately their monologic dumbness and gain a voice to call to the eternal interlocutor to dialogue: dialogue between man who listens and God who hears. So here it is not crucially significant that even the one voice alone display a secret duet, a dialogic back and forth. The subterranean didacticism of that secret dialogue becomes important only when the public dialogue out from the book into the open air can no longer arise of itself—i.e., in narrative.

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67 They are worldly language, revelatory language, and Negative speech.


By acquiescing to a dialogue with the Bible, the reader, who also listens, must respond to this dialogue as a one might in a conversation. The biblical narrative, for Rosenzweig, aspires to manifest both the revelatory message and the commanding instruction, since, “only in commanding does it offer revelation; only as message does it teach.” Dispersed throughout the Bible, argued both Buber and Rosenzweig, are carefully and consciously designated, as well as meticulously and strategically allotted repetitions of words (Leitworter), phrases and sentences—which even refer to one another through direct citation or allusion. By responding to these repetitions, the reader is guided through the text and ultimately discerns the divine commandments and their subsequent teachings. Even though Rosenzweig endorsed this biblical authority, he did not posit it against a philosophical epistemology. What makes the Bible so distinct from other books, Rosenzweig argued, was that it was predicated on a dialogical approach. This approach, for him, encouraged the reader to transform the historical, written words of the text into the present, spoken words of a conversation. Since, Rosenzweig averred, speaking occurs only in the present tense, the reader draws the biblical words out of their historical context into the present. By emphasizing the genuine vocation of restoring the traditionally Jewish text, Rosenzweig, during this time period, was also assiduously advancing his form of Jewish renewal in several related capacities. Even though framed philosophically as a propaedeutic to reading the Star, Rosenzweig, in “The New Thinking,” still maintained that his work was “addressed to the Jewish reader.” This is certainly unsurprising, since, by this time, Rosenzweig was fully dedicated to the Lehrhaus, embarking on a new Bible translation, as well as one on Jehuda Halevi’s poetry, and ruminating on the benefits of living a fully Jewish life. Impelled by the exigency to affirm this life and all that

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70 “Secret of Biblical Narrative Form,” 134.


72 After completing “The New Thinking” essay, Rosenzweig wrote to his cousin Hans Ehrenberg that: “It is really addressed to the Jewish reader. Among the others, it has only found a few scattered ones. It might be feasible to write individual letters to those, but a printed essay can only take into account the six hundred Jews who own the Star of Redemption (there may be a hundred copies among others). In Jewish circles the book has become downright famous. I could show you the most amazing comments. This prestige really gives me my only platform, for I am writing against this prestige. Of course not against the quantity of it, which pleases me well enough, but against its quality. For this reason I deliberately exaggerate in the other direction, the general philosophical. Precisely the thing I hoped for when I insisted on a Jewish publisher has happened, while the thing that I feared, and made me hesitate to publish it during my lifetime, has not happened: [The Star] has made me famous among the Jews but has not obstructed my influence with the Jews. And the reason for both is that they haven’t read it. Again and again I am amazed at how little its readers know it. Everyone thinks it is an admonition to eat kosher. The beautiful phrase of my Catholic name-saint: tantum quisque intelligit, quantum operatur, applies also to the passive intelligitur. And this is all to the good” (Glatzer, 145).
takes place within it, these projects, for Rosenzweig, were examples of the philosophical methodology inaugurated in the *Star* and summarized in “The New Thinking.”

Yet, Rosenzweig meticulously averred, in “The New Thinking,” that a reliance on speech is not necessarily circumscribed to so-called “religious problem,” since it refers to logical, ethical, and aesthetic impasses as well. As Rosenzweig reminds his readers in the “New Thinking” essay, the actual word “religion” is deliberately absent in the *Star.* In his discussions of both Christianity and Judaism, Rosenzweig imparts on them a certain epistemological prevalence that affirms eternity in time. By discussing both Christianity and Judaism is such terms, however, Rosenzweig did not argue that a Jew or Christian resides any closer to the Divine than anyone else. In fact, as a ubiquitous philosophical methodology, speech thinking, for Rosenzweig was not limited to a Jew or Christian. Speech, for him, is a divine gift bestowed upon all people. After all, “God created precisely not religion, but rather the world. And when He reveals himself, the world still remains in existence all around, and, indeed, is only afterward genuinely created for the first time.” The evidence of revelation, for Rosenzweig, then, is disclosed in dialogue: people are able to speak, hear, and respond to one another.

Since Rosenzweig wrote this essay for a distinct audience, living in a distinct time and place, his relationship to his speech-thinking methodology as “real life” precluded Rosenzweig from permitting in any future edition of the *Star an inclusion of the “New Thinking” essay.* By engaging in Speech-thinking as a philosophical discourse and as a lived event, Rosenzweig argued that the “authentically” spoken or written word can only be disclosed to a dialogical partner, so that the so-called other may actualize and, in fact, respond to this word. Rosenzweig’s archetypal “new theologian,” must also be a philosopher “for the sake of his integrity.” Philosophy and theology, these two historically, equally emulous vocations, for Rosenzweig, must rely on one another in order to fully appreciate the relationship between God, World, and man. Quite independent of the content of his own theology, Rosenzweig called for a theologian-philosopher

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73 Even though the word does in fact appear in the text, Rosenzweig is trying to accomplish something with this.


75 Glatzer, “Forward”, ix.

76 *Star*, 106.
impelled to translate “theological problems into human terms” and to bring “human problems into the pale of
theology.” So, the new thinking, Rosenzweig hoped, would emerge as the ubiquitous means for both characterizing and
discerning the world, while also advancing the course of a “lived life.” Yet, Rosenzweig, himself, as an innovator of this
philosophical methodology aspired to elude any sequent acclaim for this work, in the same way that many generations
espoused a dualistic Weltanschauung without even being acquainted with Plato. Rosenzweig hoped to be cited without
actually being cited.

II.2. Speech-Thinking and Rosenzweig’s Turn to the Biblical Text

The great Neo-Kantian, Hermann Cohen, was increasingly becoming more and more wary of his generation’s almost
impetuous approbation of Baruch Spinoza’s supposed role in the development and shaping of the Jew in the modern
world. In fact, Cohen advanced the opposite view—by both publicly challenging the divine integrity of the Bible in his
Theological Political Treatise, and by openly defying religious authority, Spinoza betrayed the Jewish people. In the
inaugural lecture for the recently opened Berlin Bnei Brith office, entitled ‘das Verhältnis Spinozas zum Judentum’ Cohen
responded to his contemporaries’ increasingly positive portrayal of, what he thought to be, a renegade Jew. In what
could be considered a unyielding diatribe against Spinoza, Cohen, in this lecture, vigorously supported and maintained
Spinoza’s original excommunication—for Cohen, Spinoza, unambiguously should have been excommunicated, yet he
should have been exiled from the community for a host of different reasons.

Toward the end of his life, Rosenzweig bemoaned the fact that his generation ignored the theological
predicament Cohen confronted in this lecture. In his essay, “Über den Vortrag Hermann Cohens ‘das Verhältnis Spinozas zum
Judentum’” Rosenzweig not only chided his contemporaries for their disregard towards Cohen’s observations, but also
reproached Cohen for his “tiefe Ungerechtigkeit” towards Spinoza. Rosenzweig wrote: “Die Zeit mag sich auf die tiefe

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Rosenzweig disputed with Cohen’s reading of Spinoza, because of, what Rosenzweig felt to be, Cohen’s inability to fully recognize his own personal disposition, his own personal existence. Rosenzweig also faulted Cohen for relying on certain epistemological presuppositions:

For Rosenzweig, what lurks in the shadows of all epistemological claims, whether in philological knowledge, or even in the biblical word, is God’s revelation. Because of the prevailing role Spinoza played in the development of the secular world, we are obliged to, Rosenzweig averred, reprobate Spinoza for his persistent denial of divine revelation. Given his overall erudition of Jewish tradition, Spinoza should have recognized that ensconced within his epistemological challenges to Jewish tradition was a possible traditionally amenable confrontation with the tradition itself. While Jewish tradition was based on an epistemological event, revelation, Spinoza erred in his assessment of this event as a propositional truth—which prompted him to confute both divine authority and mosaic authorship. By overtly disregarding the revelatory experience affirmed in Jewish tradition, Spinoza, according to Rosenzweig overlooked the direct and overt revelatory puissance of biblical language. By inaugurating a form of biblical criticism that permits a so-called believer to liberate him or herself from the shackles of a very specific form of tradition, Spinoza, for Rosenzweig ignored the language of the Bible itself. In an allusion to Jeremiah 31.31, Rosenzweig wrote, in his 1926 essay “Scripture and Luther” that,

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81 Ibid.
... as a spotlight brings one sector of the landscape out of darkness, then another, then is dimmed, so for this person the days of his life illuminate Scripture, and let him see sometimes, amidst Scripture’s human traits, also what is more than human—today here, tomorrow there, but with today’s event implying no guarantee of tomorrow’s. Yet everywhere these human traits can, in the light of a lived day, become transparent, so that suddenly they are written into the center of his own heart, and the divinity in what has been humanly written is, for the duration of this heartbeat, as clear and certain as a voice calling in this moment into his heart and being heard. Not everything in Scripture belongs to him, not today, not ever. But he knows that he belongs to all of it. This readiness and this readiness alone is, as applied to Scripture, his belief.  

By alluding to Jeremiah’s eschatological guarantee of a new, renewed Torah “to be divinely inscribed upon the hearts of the renewed people,” Rosenzweig contended that the modern individual must experience the exigency of the biblical word, indeed the divine word, as a moment of revelation. The epistemological foundation of the Bible is not disclosed propositionally, as Spinoza vociferously maintained and his adherents Herder and Goethe approbated, rather, as Rosenzweig averred, it is existentially affirmed—word by word, sentence by sentence, teaching by teaching—and thus the truth of revelation is confirmed through love. In some sense, the Star, for Rosenzweig, can be interpreted as restoring a religious sensibility that Spinoza’s writings ultimately abrogated. So, by scrutinizing both Spinoza and Cohen, Rosenzweig was able to express his ambivalence toward secularity—he certainly denounced secularity, but only after this world adduced revelation in support of a revalorized form of biblical hermeneutics—and in support of this cultural form of Jewish renewal.

So unsurprisingly, Rosenzweig was also troubled by Cohen’s notion of Bildung. By situating the thought of Immanuel Kant at the vanguard of German humanism and the pursuit of Bildung, Hermann Cohen, penned his essay “Deutschum und Judentum” to arouse his compatriots to affirm their cultural heritage, as well as their ethical duties. Cohen

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82 “Scripture and Luther,” 59.

83 Jer. 31.31–34: “See, a time is coming—declares the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah … but such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days—declares the Lord: I will put my teaching into their innermost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. ”

84 See Star, 199. Rosenzweig writes: “This view of the relationship of the human to the divine, of the worldly to the spiritual, of the soul to revelation, was temperamentally lucid because rooted in revelation. It remained for the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century to confuse and muddy this view. Herder and Goethe claimed that the Song of Songs, as a collection of ‘worldly’ love lyrics. In this designation, ‘worldly’ expresses no more and no less than that God does not love. And this was, after all, really the opinion. Even if man ‘loved’ God as the symbol of perfection, he would never demand that God ‘requite’ his love. Spinoza’s denial of divine love for the individual soul was welcomed by the German Spinozists.”
enthusiastically announced: “Every German must know his Schiller and his Goethe and carry them in his heart with the intimacy of love. Yet this intimacy presupposes that he has won a rudimentary understanding of Kant.” \(^{85}\) While serving with an anti-aircraft unit on the Macedonian front, a young Franz Rosenzweig wrote to his parents that Cohen misconstrued this “German-Jewish symbiosis.” \(^{86}\) For Rosenzweig, the German pathos is realized not only by coalescing each wondrous word of Goethe and Schiller’s alluring literary and poetic realities into a cogent and collective German identity, but also by accommodating the alterity of even those common Germans into one’s experience and one’s life. By oscillating between profound embarrassment and ethical responsibility, a German should encounter the same consanguineous pathos that German Jews feel towards the Ostjuden. Yet, Bildung for many of Rosenzweig’s contemporaries was less about the individual pursuit towards aesthetic advancement and ethical responsibility, and more about a profound commitment towards a regenerated cultural form of religion. In fact, this form of religion replaced Judaism for many German Jews. Quotes from Goethe decorated many of the Shabbat homilies given in German synagogues. Proficiency in classical German texts became the staple for Jewish identity and pride, and rabbis such as Anton Nehamia Nobel never disappointed his congregation. \(^{87}\) As Mendes Flohr points out, “the fact that Nobel, an Orthodox rabbi, was also regarded as one of the leading Talmudic authorities in Germany only enhanced his reputation

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\(^{86}\) Briefe und Tagebücher, 444–45; Rosenzweig wrote: “Deutscher sein heißt eben die Verantwortung für das eigne Volk ganz zu übernehmen, also nicht bloß mit Goethe und Schiller und Kant harmonieren, sondern auch mit den andern und vor allem mit den Minderwertigen und Durchschnittlichen, mit dem Assesor, dem Korpsstudenten, dem kleinen Beamten, dem dickschädeligen Bauern, dem steifen Oberlehrer; der wirkliche Deutsche muß diese all in sein Herz schießen, oder an ihnen leiden; den Durchschnittsfranzosen aber kann er ruhig beiseitelnassen; so wie wir rot werden über den Durchschnittsjuden, wenn er ‚uns blamiert.’ Das braucht kein geheimer Rasseninstinkt zu sein, es genügt vollkommen, wenn sein Volk den Druck von außen, in unserem Fall durch ewigen Hebrew [Antisemitismus], (sein Paradewort) so zusammengepreßt wird, daß sie eben—Volk werden, nämlich (Richard Wagner:) ‘eine gemeinsame Not empfinden’ oder also in unserem Fall: ein gemeinsamer Stolz (Ehrlic! Rathenau! Gambetta, Spinoza!) und eine gemeinsame Scham (der Drückeberger, der Kriegsgewinner) haben. Cohen verwechselte das was er als Europäer im Deutschen findet mit dem was der Deutsche darin findet. Gewiß: ‘Deutsche Philosophie und Musik’ sind europäische Phänomene, aber französische Malerei und englische Politik, russischer Roman und Russische Religiosität auch. Gegenüber der russischen Frömmigkeit erscheint die deutsch genau so verächtlich, wie neben der deutschen Philosophie die westeuropäische. Schelling durfte der Frau von Staël, die ihm mit Locke, kam, kurz die Diskussion abscheiden:je méprise Locke (Schiller-Goethe-Briefwechsel 1804), aber Soloweff braucht sich auch nicht von Harnack über das Wesen des Christentums belehren zu lassen. Dieses Europäertum des Gebildeten kreuzt sich nun bei ihm mit dem Volkstum, das er Außerdem hat und das ihn dem Gebildeten des andern Volks entfremdet, dem Ungebildeten des eignen verbündet. Aber bei Cohen ist nur Europäertum da, ein genuines Deutschum mit dem es sich kreuzen könnte fehlt, und das Judentum, das da ist (und wie!), geht bekanntlich—keine Kreuzung ein. Und so bleibt’s tatsächlich beim Nebeneinander und die dem Equilibristik der Schrift Deutschum und Judentum, die auf das Christliche im Deutschen reflektiert und das dann für jüdische erklärt. Wohl bekommens! Aber das alles ist doch nur die ins Geistige übertragene Karikatur, die ihr in Sozialen darstellt.”

among the Jews as a Goethenkenner." By participating within the synoptic space of Bildung, as a distinct form of German humanism and as a regenerated cultural, civil religion, the German-Jewish community, for Rosenzweig, pretermitted its response to divine love. This humanistic culture, for him, consequently was bereft of it.

By focusing on what Henri Bergson would call the élan vital of the spoken word between two people, Rosenzweig approached the notion of Bildung within Judaism. For him, only by wittingly embracing the idea that deeply ensconced within the Jewish sources is an epistemology that informs the readers experience proleptically and only through dialogue with it can a sustainable Jewish culture be built. This dialogue between the reader and text cannot account for any type of abstract Jewish essence, since this experience allows the reader to correlate his or her thoughts to his or her life—which also exposes how Jewish life is bereft of any abstract Jewish existence. Neither Jewish existence nor a Jewish essence can be reduced to unqualified object of thought. In his 1919 essay, “Das Wesen des Judentums,” Rosenzweig addressed how to reconcile Jewish existence and Jewish essence. There, he described how certain individual particularities accord the existence of anything universal, in this case, a definition of what it means to be Jewish. Even by discovering such a definition, the current fragmentation of Jewish life, for Rosenzweig, would still endure. For Rosenzweig, this fragmentation, manifest in the various ways Jews demarcate their identity—i.e., through scrupulous adherence to Halakhah (Orthodoxy); or through adherence to an assured universal-rational ethical principle (Liberalism); or through an adherence to a renewed form of Jewish nationalism (Zionist)—cannot be resolved by simply coalescing any general similarities existing between these Jewish movements into one broad definition of Judaism. For Rosenzweig, these movements already indicate a discontinuity within the sphere of a lived Jewish existence. Only a genuine return to what the Jews experienced at Sinai, for him, could allow for any reconciliation of Jewish existence with Jewish essence, which can only be ascertained though Jewish life. As he states at the conclusion of the essay: “Das Ziel is kein ‘Wesen’ des Judentums, sondern das ganze Judentum, überhaupt kein Wesen, sondern das Leben.”

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88 Mendes-Flohr, German Jews, 28.


90 GS III, 526.
well-known, Rosenzweig concluded the *Star* with the same injunction: “into Life.” In his 1923 essay, “Apologetic Thinking,” Rosenzweig explained this difficulty in how one could translate the entirety of Judaism into one’s own life. He wrote:

This is certainly connected with the peculiar lack of self-consciousness in Judaism, which is discussed in the first part of these remarks; it is indeed impossible to make a Talmudic passage comprehensible to someone who does not already understand it; for this purpose one would have to be able to open, so to speak, each time a whole complete pictorial atlas of Jewish history, Jewish faces, Jewish life, which of course cannot exist.  

This lack of self-consciousness in Judaism, for Rosenzweig, is not based on dogma, since any attempt to reduce it to an arrangement of quotations from the Jewish textual tradition results in a “tragicomic caricature of Judaism.” Anyone can quote from the sources, but Rosenzweig argued that by quoting from these sources, the Jew must rely on the written, closed language of Jewish texts while simultaneously refashioning the grammar in them to accommodate oral speech. The quotes must participate in a similar way to speech—as lived. Rosenzweig, as we should recall, shared Judah Halevi’s desire to situate God’s spoken word, as written in the Bible, in the center of religious life. Rosenzweig, in his *Star* and his translation projects, wanted to provide his readers with a biblical commentary while actively participating in and advancing the divine speech of revelation in time—and thus affirming entirety of Judaism in each moment. So, Rosenzweig meticulously refined his notion of biblical hermeneutics, so that he could affirm not only that revelation and speech are coterminous, but are also temporally and physically inexhaustible.

In a letter to Gershom Scholem dated in 1921, Rosenzweig sent a copy of his recently published translation, “der Tischdank” (“Blessing after the meal”) to him with the hope that Scholem would offer his well-known propensity for relentless criticism. After the publication of the *Star*, Rosenzweig discovered his newly acquired passion, translation.  

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91 “Apologetic Thinking,” 100.

92 Ibid: “We all know what a tragicomic caricature of Judaism results if, apparently with complete objectivity, one strings a series of quotations together; and in doing so, it hardly matters whether the assembling is done by the Jewish or anti-Semitic side; on the contrary, the things that Eisenmenger and his predecessors produce as ‘fiery satanic bullets’ from the arsenal of the Talmud could more truly lure one to this book than many a recent collection of carefully filtered ‘rays of light.’”

and he commenced on a translation project on Jewish liturgical texts, so that visitors to his Shabbat table unfamiliar with the Hebrew language could still actively participate in the rituals. In this letter, Rosenzweig explained his project to Scholem and he indeed criticized Rosenzweig’s translation.95 He argued that Rosenzweig’s translation lacked a certain Jewish disposition and in fact struck a Christian tone.96 Rosenzweig addressed this observation in his subsequent letter to Scholem by stating: “Es gibt ja keine bloß sprachgeschichtlichen Tatsachen. Die deutsche Sprache ist, in diesen drei Namen, christliche Sprache geworden. Wer ins Deutsche übersetzt, muß in irgendwelchem Maße ins Christliche übersetzen.”97 All efforts to translate texts into German, for Rosenzweig, then, is also an effort to “Christianize” these texts—there is no avoiding it. By reiterating to Scholem that his task in this translation was to invite non-Hebrew readers (Jewish and non-Jewish) to participate in the cultural and religious practices that make up the "Jewish" character of his home, Rosenzweig wrote:


94 See: ch. 1.
96 Ibid.
97 GS, 1:2, 699.
unser Eigenes führt. Das einzige, was wir haben, ist die Gewißheit, daß e runs schließlich dahin führt. Ein “Schließlich”, das ja in jedem Augenblick eintreten kann. Sonst wäre es freilich unerträglich.  

The vocation of Judaism, Rosenzweig argued here, is found in translation. We should recall that, in Rosenzweig’s Nachwort to his translation of Judah Halevi’s poetry into German, he had hoped to affirm not only the possibility but also the importance of translating between languages and cultures down through the generations, so that his audience could recognize than an authentic conservation takes place only after you translate the speech of the Other into your own. In this letter, Rosenzweig argued for precisely the same thing. By translating the linguistic style and voice of the “Tischdank” into the German language, Rosenzweig hoped to teach his “guests” to hear and speak these words as if they belonged to them—we should also recall that Rosenzweig wanted to revalorize and renew Jewish culture by placing Hebrew language in the center of Jewish life, since it required one to assume the “total heritage of the language.” Translation and a revalorized form of biblical hermeneutics are crucial, for Rosenzweig, to any form of cultural regeneration and, consequently, he established methodologies for both.

So, for Rosenzweig, philosophical abstractions ensconced in the content of a literary work depend on its linguistic form, or style, of the writing. Hermeneutically speaking, not only do content and form require mutual dialogue, but also ultimately the linguistic form discloses the content of a given literary work. For example, Rosenzweig felt a translator’s task laid in his or her commitment to preserving linguistic style, which for Rosenzweig ultimately discloses the meaning of a given text. Goethe, for him, raised the question of the distinction between “religious content and aesthetic form,” but was “of little help toward a lasting solution.” Poetry, for Rosenzweig, was “after all not divided from prose by an unscalable wall. No expression is entirely without form; pure prose is merely a liminal

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98 Ibid., 699–700.


100 “Goethe touches here on a seminal question in the speaking and hearing of the biblical word; and it is striking that for Goethe, as anyone who takes the question seriously, the answer seems at first to have to be either one side of a dichotomy or the other. It seems, that is, that since there can be no truce between the claims of religious content and the claims of aesthetic form, the translator must choose between the claims of poetry and prose.” Franz Rosenzweig, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald, “The Secret of Biblical Narrative Form,” Scripture and Translation, ed. Everett Fox and Lawrence Rosenwald (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 130.

101 “Secret of Biblical Narrative Form,” 130.
Rosenzweig argued, in contrast to Monsieur Jourdain in Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, that “we speak verse without knowing it.” He maintained that poetry, as well as religious texts such as the Bible or the *Tischdank*, can and should be translated stylistically, so that they, like in a translation of the *Odyssey*, are “once again felt and sometimes discernible.” Even though the suppositional dichotomy between poetry and prose should be apparent in translation according to Rosenzweig, he still maintained that this dichotomy should be obfuscated in actual speech, as well as in authentic writing. Speech is not limited to one or the other. Contrary to the act of writing poetry, an aesthetic, Rosenzweig argued that the Bible emerged through the event of speech. For him, the linguistic form affords dialogical ends. Rosenzweig maintained that in order to attain a potential dialogue with the “epic past,” the so-called genre of narrative assists, as Michael Fishbane explained, “to actualize a present dialogue with the epic past, just as the genres of instruction or prophecy may reorient one to the demands and potential of temporality. Each literary form thus has its own *Sitz im Leben* which may be engaged through reading. There is no pre-given formula for this, though the very grammaticality of the text points the way.”

So when translating the Bible, the translator must, according to Rosenzweig, translate as prose when the text is prose and do the same with poetry. As he states:

> This is of course seldom possible; but where translation succeeds, what it renders is not on the ‘poetic form’ transmitted, but also the living word, the winged word *[das geflügelte Wort]*, whose flight leaves both the empty form *in se* and the crippled content *in se* far below it.

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Rosenzweig continues his criticism of Goethe’s position, by stating: “… the line of division between the ‘religious’ aspects of a text and the ‘aesthetic’ aspects has to be drawn otherwise than at first seemed. Or rather: drawing the line of division is itself a mistake in the first place. An aesthetic object striving to be art for art’s sake, a poetry altogether free of prose are of course notions that can arise on in opposition to the wildly extreme notion of a ‘purely religious’ object, an absolutely unpoetical prose. (Moreover: if on the aesthetic side there arises the sin of being only for oneself, then on the religious side the ghastly mirror-image of that sin can arise and be embodied in response.) But where the aesthetic object does not reduce itself to a special, religious sub-set of culture, but remains in possession of all its connections with reality—aesthetic reality included. Religious discourse does not sink into the prose of bare ‘content’: rather it must—for it cannot do otherwise—avail itself of all means of expression, must sound all tones, must possess all its apparently fixed and prefabricated, independently transmittable ‘content’ only by grace of the transient moment of oral expression” (ibid., 130–31).

105 Ibid., 131.


Interestingly, Rosenzweig correlated the “lived word” to a “winged word,” which, hermeneutically speaking, can be relegated to how quotations, in this case from the Jewish textual tradition, more specifically from the Hebrew Bible, function in lived speech—which is crucial, for him, to a successful translation. In German dictionaries the phrase “*geflügelte Wort*” can mean either “familiar quotation” or “household word.” As “winged words,” quotations, in fact, are endowed with wings, subsequently allowing them to traverse boundaries and actually transport themselves (and their readers) from place to place.  

Quotations in this sense, then, function hermeneutically, similar to that of the Greek messenger of the gods Hermes, who, endowed with winged feet, served them by imparting each word of each god to one another. Both the function of Hermes and that of the quotation permit divine action, disconnected from the world both spatially and temporally, to conjoin with words, and thus, enter into “lived life.” The German word “*anführen*,” meaning “to cause to appear,” which is another word associated with quotation, denotes a similar action—to draw something as wide asunder as space and time immanent. The phrase “*Geflügelte Worte*” had cultural import for Rosenzweig and his contemporaries as well. “*Geflügelte Worte*” was the title of the Berlin German philologist Georg Buchmann’s famous 1864 book, reprinted in 1912, of German citations and proverbs.  

By alluding to the Greek poet Homer’s celebrated apophthegm (*epea pteroenta*) in his title “*Geflügelte Worte*”, Buchmann’s book on quotation, interestingly, was already a quotation—although without the actual quotation marks.  

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108 An organic metaphor of “winged words,” flight, and traversing boundaries relating to quotation can be found in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s playful essay of 1868, “Quotation and Originality” (see *Emerson: Essays and Poems* [New York, N.Y.: Library of America, 1996], 1028-42). Emerson began his ruminations on what he felt to be the inevitability of quotation in regard to the infeasibility of originality with a natural metaphor: “Whoever looks at the insect world, at flies, aphides, gnats, and innumerable parasites, and even at the infant mammals, must have remarked the extreme content they take in suction, which constitutes the main business of their life. If we go into a library or news-room, we see the same function on a higher plane, performed with ardor, with equal impatience of interruption, indicating the sweetness of the act. In the highest civilization the book is still the highest delight” (1028). Emerson related the deed of quotation to the pure, innocent naiveté of a baby breastfeeding, as well as the cunning and seemingly devious activity of insects—sucking and extracting the sap from vegetation and transporting it, on their wings, to other plant life, which causes new life to emerge. By situating the act of quoting within the sphere of natural activity, Emerson, with Nietzschean undertones, placed the role of quotation in the cycle of eternal return—a continual recycling of the old to create anew, which is the divine gift. Emerson concluded his essay precisely with this image: “The divine gift is ever the instant life, which receives and uses and creates, and can well bury the old in the omnipotency with which Nature decomposes all her harvest for recomposition” (1042).


Usually, as a typographical sign, quotation marks remain unspoken—we are required to see them, not hear them. Rosenzweig, like many others such as Walter Benjamin and Karl Kraus, hoped to refashion the way writers and translators understood and employed quotation—which included the distinction between seeing and hearing—by focusing of Halevi’s practice of *Musivstil*, where he wove together quotations from biblical texts, in order to construct a new linguistic reality steeped in the Hebrew Bible. In all of his translation activities, Rosenzweig hoped to transform the “winged word” into the “lived word” in the same way the Jew translates the “winged word” into his or her “lived life”—by actually hearing the words of the Bible.

Impelled by the exigency to hear, the reader of the Bible, according to Rosenzweig, discovers a written scintilla of biblical speech. Rosenzweig argued that by reciting the biblical text, the reader affirms his or her silent self and the voice of the text reemerges which induces a dialogue with the divine. Consequently, the moment of interpretation, for Rosenzweig, emerges by recovering this speech act while reading and thus developing a correlation between the reader and his or her experience and that of the biblical text. By juxtaposing citations from Walter Calé (1881–1904), Goethe, and from the Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 31b, Rosenzweig in a passage in the *Star*, described this moment.

111 Rosenzweig, "A Review of a Translation Into the Hebrew of Spinoza's Ethics," *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, 3rd ed., ed. Nahum Glatzer (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 270. He writes: "Here the eternal language can impose its own particular character only in incidental locutions; for example, when it replaces the monotonous tattoo, q.e.d., which recurs throughout the book wherever something has been proved, by the Talmudic term, *shema miney*, 'Hear [conclude] it from this,' in its usual two-letter abbreviation. And in spite of the fact that Hebrew, like Greek, Latin, and German is able to express the idea of 'demonstration' by a word deriving from the visual sphere. This is a striking instance of how in the camp of the enemy, at the very heart of the 'geometric' method, the spirit of revelation, which is hostile to the image, to 'form,' manages to break through. 'Ye saw no form, only a voice' [Deut. 4:12]."

112 See "Secret of Biblical Narrative Form."

113 In a November 1924 letter to Martin Goldner, Nahum Glatzer, Hans Epstein, and Ms. Fürth, Rosenzweig explained this position: "In this immediacy we may not 'express' God [Gott aussprechen], but rather address God [God ansprechen] in the individual commandment. For whoever seeks to express him will discover that he who cannot be expressed will become he who cannot be found. Only in the commandment can the voice of him who commands be heard. No matter how well the written word may fit with our own thoughts, it cannot give us the faith that creation is completed, to the degree that we experience this by keeping the Sabbath, and inaugurating it with, 'And the heaven and the earth were completed.' Not that doing necessarily results in hearing and understanding. But one hears differently when one hears in the doing. All the days of the year Balaam’s talking ass may be a mere fairy tale, but not on the Sabbath wherein this portion is read in the synagogue, when it speaks to me out of the open Torah. But if not a fairy tale, what then? I cannot say right now; if I should think about it today, when it is past, and try to say what it is, I should probably utter the platitude that it is a fairy tale. But on that day, in that very hour, it is—well, certainly not a fairy tale, but that which is communicated to me provided I am amble to fulfill the command of the hour, namely, to open my ears" (*Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, Glatzer, 245–46).
But this universal intelligibility cannot be attained in silence. It requires the intervention of speech. Through the miracle of language, speech overcomes the resistance of the Today that once was, and though, separated by language, still is as today. It is the first effect of the spirit to translate, to erect a bridge between man and man [Walter Calé], between tongue and tongue. The Bible must surely be the first book to be translated and then held equal to the original text. God speaks everywhere with the words of men [Berachot 31b]. And the spirit means precisely that the translator, the one who hears and transmits, knows himself equal to the one who first spoke and received the word. Spirit thus leads man and gives him the confidence to stand on his two feet. It is man’s own spirit [Goethe] precisely as the spirit of transmission and translation.114

Rosenzweig imparts on to religious language in general and the Hebrew Bible more specifically a “non-fanatical” and distinct obeisance, so that he may supplant Hermann Cohen’s hermeneutical proclivity toward demythologizing the Hebrew Bible with his own dialogical method.115 Rosenzweig argued that the Hebrew Bible displays the panoptic efforts made by the Jewish people to coalesce divine election discursively into a unified narrative. By studying and ultimately citing this text, the Jew is required to not only commemorate this remarkable event, but also recognize the development towards divine election from creation to revelation to redemption. Although in so doing, conventionally held hermeneutical strategies and translations, according to Rosenzweig, allowed the reader to feel comfortable, at times even at home, with an ancient and alienating text. For Rosenzweig, readers should interpret the Bible with at least some feeling of anxiety or uneasiness—a sense of discord—since the Lebensform ensconced in this text aspires to attain ethical and religious goals that are not akin to post-Enlightenment sensibilities. A translation of the Bible, and subsequent interpretations, should not at all be reassuring, rather it should remain overtly obstreperous. By focusing on the alienating aspects of Bible, Rosenzweig hoped to establish, what his contemporary Bertolt Brecht termed a Verfremdungseffekt,117 and he interfused a notion of Galut [exile] into his biblical hermeneutics, so that he could transform Scripture from the cultural and religious vestige it was into spiritually resonant text. By conjoining the Galat to a form of

114 Star, 366.
115 Rosenzweig to Ernst Simon, 18 September 1924 (Glatzer, Life and Thought, 136). For a discussion of non-fanatical in Rosenzweig, see Gibbs, 57.
116 By placing the Bible at the center of revelation, Rosenzweig did not intend to demythologize it or reduce it, as Cohen did, to a universal morality. As the quintessential event of revelation, the Bible, for Rosenzweig, is the bedrock of Jewish memory.
117 Bertolt Brecht, “Kleines Organon für das Theater,” Schriften zum Theater 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964), 32–33.
biblical hermeneutics, Rosenzweig hoped to confuse and refashion commonly presumed notions of both the *Galut* as well as how the Bible is interpreted. Rosenzweig argued that *Galut*, ceases to be *Galut* as soon as those in it feel at home there. For those who still perceive their present, existential reality as one residing in *Galut*, Rosenzweig averred, are required to coalesce this reality into the empirical world, and live a felicitous life there. That is to say, for Rosenzweig, those living in *Galut* are required to transform the world into a place of *Galut*, so that they can capitalize on their *Galut* as a genuine residence. By affirming the experience of *Galut* without having to enjoin its words onto the present moment, the Bible, according to Rosenzweig, accords those experiencing the *Galut* a faithful home-in-the- *Galut*. The experience of *Galut*, then, is what impels the reader to search for meaning in the Bible.\footnote{In a letter to Buber, Rosenzweig wrote

> But now you point to a new principle of selection, through which the vast subject matter of learning [Lernstoff] you unfurl can again become a teaching [Lehre], a principle more trustworthy than anyone has attempted to set up. You introduce the concept of inner power. For inner power is what you demand when you ask him who learns to stake his whole being for the learning, to make himself a link in the chain of tradition and thus become a chooser, not through his will but through his ability. We accept as teaching what enters us from out of the accumulated knowledge of the centuries in its apparent and, above all, in its real contradictions. We do not know in advance what is and is not Jewish teaching; and when someone tries to tell us, we turn away in unbelief and anger. We discern in the story of Hillel and the heathen, quoted *ad nauseam*, the smiling mockery of the sage, and it is not to his first words that we adhere, but to his final word: go and learn.\footnote{Franz Rosenzweig, “The Builders: Concerning the Law,” *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 75.}

As the wellspring of an active, living Jewish memory, the Bible, Rosenzweig argued, draws Jews back to the moment of revelation, Sinai, and allows them to continually participate in this event and respond to God’s word. By incessantly communicating to Jews through their study of this text, the “inner power” of the Bible gradually informs all aspects of Jewish life. Certainly as disclosed in his translation of the Bible and Halevi’s poems, as well as in his many letters to Buber on the subject, and, of course, his characterization of the Jewish calendar year as a continual, living portrayal of events described in the Bible, Rosenzweig maintained that Jews must always respond to the event of revelation. In fact, he

\footnote{See “Afterword.”}
argued that the Jew’s desire to read the Torah on Shabbat is to recall the event of revelation. By citing Exodus 33.11 and referring to Deuteronomy 34.10, Rosenzweig explained:

… the joy of the great receiver of revelation, to whom God ‘spoke face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend,’ and to whom he gave greater recognition than to any other prophet of Israel, is followed, in the order of the day, with the reading of the weekly portion to the congregation by its representatives. On the eve of the Sabbath, expression is given to the knowledge that the earth is a creation; in the morning, we find utterance of the people’s awareness of being elect through the gift of Torah [Berachot 11b] which signifies that eternal life has been planted in their midst.120

According to Rosenzweig, by recounting the event of revelation, the Bible advances a perspicacious notion of messianism safeguarding it from the disposition toward mere “story telling.”121 Impelled by the Bible’s copious adjurations to bestow a series of rituals and festivals, later affirmed by the Jewish calendar, Rosenzweig maintained that already ensconced in the Bible is a continuous and repetitive sequence of ritual observance—which, of course, bespeaks God’s eternity. Even though Rosenzweig approbated a phenomenology of revelation amenable to biblical and rabbinic hermeneutics that particularly effused from the sources of Judaism, revelation, for him, remained a universal category—Judaism, particularly, Jewish hermeneutics, is only one of many responses to the all-inclusive event and experience of revelation. Rosenzweig did not endorse some sort of essentialist, meta-linguistic abstraction representing an eidolon of truth. Nor did he suggest that revelation disclosed any truth about God’s ultimate being. Revelation, for Rosenzweig, disclosed the moral reality of God’s love and the categorical imperative to respond to it. One does not respond to this love by blindly embracing traditionalist notions of it, since, as he wrote to Rudolf Hallo in the spring of 1922, that: “Die Offenbarung hat nur dies zu tun: die Welt auch wieder unreligiös zu machen.”122 Contrary to his medieval predecessors, as well as his contemporaries’ notions of God’s being, Rosenzweig maintained that one may never truly know God theoretically, only

120 Star, 312.

121 See “Secret of Biblical Narrative Form.”

122 GS 1:2, 768.
practically—we gain knowledge of Him through our response to His love. Contrary to Kraus, language, for Rosenzweig, does not engender any form of morality, rather it guides us towards a more moral existence.

Language certainly meliorates people’s overall relationships with one another. Rosenzweig asserted, however, these relationships manifest not simply as a result of an inveterate system of linguistic signs, but also connote an element of alterity ensconced in one’s speech, bestowing upon it, then, something miraculous. By simultaneously imparting reality and the origin of that reality, true language, not that of “an independent subordinated science of language,” “appears as the original symbolism of reality itself and accordingly in the closest sense of ‘identity’ with this reality.”

Certainly Rosenzweig did not assert that all speech befallen in language points to transcendence, but for him, revelation is disclosed linguistically. Philosophically speaking, Rosenzweig wanted to supplant the idealist’s proclivity toward abstract philosophical contemplation with a refashioned form of biblical hermeneutics, by demonstrating how the Bible, linguistically and hermeneutically, asseverated the revelatory character of dialogical speech.

Rosenzweig approbated language and biblical hermeneutics to the sole means to encountering God. These two activities disclose God’s relationship to humanity. While attempting to delimit speech and textual hermeneutics, Rosenzweig establishes that the line of demarcation between the two is unconfined. For Rosenzweig, then, biblical hermeneutics manifests these two activities by concentrating on the role of hearing in renewing the biblical word. In the Star, Rosenzweig alludes to those biblical texts that accentuate diverse genres of literature, such as poetry, hymns, even the biblical narrative, so that he may simultaneously administer biblical hermeneutics in restoring divine speech-acts, while imparting a sociological, and at times, an anthropological analysis of Jewish liturgy. By ruminating on the performance and the effect of speech and language, Rosenzweig developed a philosophical methodology predicated not solely on biblical exegesis, but on the sagacious ability to cite from these texts, in order to ameliorate the seemingly ubiquitous means Jews adopt to communicate to God, their liturgy. Rosenzweig asserts that biblical speech is not a heuristic device, nor is it a propaedeutic, chronicling and expounding upon revelation, rather that the speech itself is

123 Star, 150.

124 Ibid., 178: “For in the world of revelation everything becomes word, and what cannot become word is either prior or posterior to this world.”
Rosenzweig asserts that by citing, the imagination impressed upon each word spoken historically can be renewed in the present. The sonority composed in poetry, with its abundant use of citations, preeminently advances a more conscientious awareness of what is being spoken. Similar to what one might experience in poetry, Rosenzweig affirmed that revelation is a coadunation of speech and hearing, where God is discovered through speech. In a midrashic reworking of Isaiah 55:8, Rosenzweig writes, “the ways of God are different from the ways of man, but the word of God and the word of man are the same. What man hears in his heart as his own human speech is the very word which comes out of God’s mouth.” Through an extended and continued cycle of questioning and response, revelation expounds the dialogue between a person and God. In 1919, Rosenzweig emphasized the biblical component to this relationship in a letter to his cousin Hans Ehrenberg, where he argued that while a person communicates to God through the language of Jewish liturgy, God responds through a concatenation of biblical citations. He writes, “Dazu müßte man es Satz für Satz kommentieren, besonderes II 2, wo neben der offenkundigen (durch die Zitate) Beziehung auf das ‘A.T.’ eine verstecktere auf die jüdische Liturgie hergeht und die Reihenfolge der Kategorien z.T. bestimmt.” Rosenzweig, here, argues that God’s response, His word, is ascertained through a study of the Bible text. God speaks through His citations. Furthermore, a person’s response is also comprised of citations—through the Jewish liturgy—which, although at times is remarkably intimate, is an expression of the overall communal religious experience. The Jewish liturgy, as citations of God’s word in the Hebrew Bible, is for Rosenzweig, as one commentator wrote, a “citation of a citation” that sends “back to God as He whose true essence is absent from the text that speaks of him or that cites his words.” The community evokes the divine through citations of the divine word. In the Star, Rosenzweig further explicated this

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125 By affirming three moments in written-speech (the hymn, poetry, and the biblical narrative), Rosenzweig addressed the Kantian notion of heteronomy and autonomy. He maintained that these three moments correlate to his tripartite relationship between God, the world, and the human through creation, revelation, and redemption. As we will see in ch. 4, by providing a philosophical and midrashic hermeneutic to the hymn of Psalm 115, the poetry of the “Song of Songs,” and the biblical narrative of Genesis 1, Rosenzweig argues that these texts are the primary texts for addressing God’s love, moral responsibility, the virtue of community, and the necessity of liturgy.

126 The true poetic is found in Musivstil of Halevi—the weaving together of biblical quotes.

127 Star, 151. Glatzer makes this association with his list of Jewish sources.


relationship between lived-experience and textual hermeneutics (oral and written speech) and between literary and metaphorical interpretations. For him, these relationships form a dialectic:

If language is more than only an analogy, if it is truly analogue—and therefore more than analogue—then what we hear as a living word in our I and which resounds toward us out of our Thou must also be ‘as it is written’ in that great historical testament of revelation whose essentiality we recognize from the presentness of our experience. Once more we seek the word of man in God.  

By ascertaining the “word of man” (human speech) in God’s written word, revelation, for Rosenzweig, is disclosed through the “mute self’s” transformation into the “eloquent soul” as a result of divine love. Rosenzweig maintained that a “spoken I and you” in the present tense is transmuted into the divine word in revelation, “as it is written.” And for Rosenzweig, the “We” spoken in liturgy, characterizes communal affinity and consanguinity. The chorale sung by the community engenders an empyrean sonority in the world that ennobles its own existence. This music signifies a congenial assemblage of the community. Redemption, during this performance, expands. Yet, in his exegesis of the psalms in the Star, Rosenzweig did not ruminate solely on redemptive speech, but on speech more conventionally. In fact, Rosenzweig discovered in the biblical text a procurable ontology of language. He wrote, “The word they sing is We. As chant it would be something final, a full cadenza. But as word it can no more be final than any word. A word is never final, never merely spoken; it is always speaking as well. This its own life is, after all, the actual mystery of language: the word speaks.”

The enigma of how language emerged and discovered remained crucial here for Rosenzweig. By proceeding from speech to silence in his reading the Psalms, Rosenzweig aspired to import a poetic Weltanschaung onto lived-experience. In this process, he hoped that what was understood to be poetic, imprisoned in “the bookcase,” was also understood to be an imprint of morality. He wrote, “the element in which poetry moves is the idea, and as conception, the idea unites in itself the spaciality of the perceptual and the temporality of feeling, and turns them whole.

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130 Star, 198.
131 Ibid., 237.
132 Star, 371.
Poetry’s content is the world as a Whole, and its little god, man the microcosm. And thus, poetry might be expected to supply man with the mood for finding his way to that ultimate redemptive silence which should have appeared to him in the secular festivals of redemption at least as prospect and promise. In advancing this movement, Rosenzweig situates gesture and silence above word and speech. By congregating together in prayer, the efforts of community, for Rosenzweig, culminate in its eventual silence.

By augmenting assiduity in the alacrity to listen to poetry, Rosenzweig hoped that the poetic experience would ultimately transcend its sonority. Poetry, in this case, the Jewish liturgy, for him, should transcend words, so that the experience of poetry affirms ones morality and the effort to comprehend what is beyond it. Poetry is not limited to its application of words, it cites them, which has the ability to simultaneously transport and pause an ephemeral word that aims beyond itself. In both the absence of and application of the word, Rosenzweig understood poetry as the dialogue of aesthetic and religious experience, where he could delineate an ontology of silence. The tragic hero of Greek antiquity, according to Rosenzweig lived in a world before revelation, a pagan world, in which creation remained the hallmark of reality. He apprehended the world only through the language of silence and "By keeping silent, the hero breaks down the bridges which connect him with God and the world… delimiting himself… into the icy solitude of self. The self, after all, knows nothing outside of itself: it is inherently solitary." In this pre-revelation world, philosophical abstractions

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133 Ibid., 370–71.

134 Ibid., 371–72. He writes: "To be used thus, however, poetry itself would first have to learn silence, for in the world it is still tied to the soul. It would have to learn to free itself of the concept of a configuration already present in the world. It would have to bring forward a configuration; it would have to become gesture. For only gesture is beyond word and deed—not, to be sure, the gesture which attempts to say something—for this world be but a pitiful substitute for discourse, a mere stuttering; nor that gesture which only seeks to elicit action on another’s part, for this would be a pitiful substitute for one’s own deed; but that gesture which has become wholly free, wholly creative, and which is no longer directed at this or that person or thing, a gesture which perfects a man wholly for Being, for his humaneness and thereby for humanity. For whatever man expresses in himself wholly in gesture, there the space separating man from man falls away in a ‘wonderfully still’ empathy. There the word may evaporate which had tumbled headlong into this divisive interval to fill it with its own body and thus to become [what Walter Calé called] a bridge between man and man by its own heroic self-sacrifice."

135 Star, 308–9. He writes: "In eternity the spoken word fades away into the silence of perfect togetherness—for union occurs in silence only; the word unites, but those who are united fall silent. And so liturgy, the reflector which focuses the sunbeams of eternity in the small circle of the year, must introduce man to this silence. But even in liturgy, shared silence can come only at the end, and all that goes before is a preparation for this end. In the stage of preparation the word still dominates the scene. The word itself must take man to the point of learning how to share silence. His preparation begins with learning how to hear."

136 Ibid., 77.
drawn through logic are woefully chimerical, since this language is not yet real—it resides in the world of creation, as well as that of revelation.

In bridging revelation to redemption in the *Star*, Rosenzweig concentrated on the auditory elements of both. Both, by listening to God’s word in revelation and His silence in redemption, predicate a primordial act of the poetic experience, where both poetry and theology emerge. Linguistically speaking, Rosenzweig speculated whether or not the silence heard after speech is simultaneously its prerequisite. Whether by hearing God’s word through revelation or His silence in redemption, both done with undaunted alacrity, Rosenzweig maintained that this disposition to hear unconditionally remains as the fundamental condition for authentic poetizing. Precisely in this moment, of authentic poetizing, for Rosenzweig, is where the act of both theology and poetry fully emerge. Also, in terms of speech-thinking, Rosenzweig recognized the subsequent silence after speech as simultaneously the precondition for such speech.

II.3. Conclusion

When quoting or interpreting a Biblical text in the *Star*, Rosenzweig leaves the purpose of the interpretation, as well as his hermeneutical methods somewhat ambiguous or opaque. Commensurate to both his translation as well and his dialogical goals, Rosenzweig places the reader in charge of discerning his philosophical system and method and how it plays a role in forming the philosophical and theological structure of the *Star*. By providing the list of Jewish sources at the end of the *Star*, the reader is encouraged to examine the theological and philosophical texts that circumscribe his presuppositions and hermeneutical method.

It is a well-rehearsed argument that the key to unlocking Rosenzweig’s philosophical hermeneutics is located in the life or system of dialogue. As we have seen already in this paper Rosenzweig wanted to comprehend the word, in conversation, interposed between people, that, in human speech, arouses the “self,” the “I” in one’s *Mensch*. We learned how love, discovered in this dialogue for Rosenzweig, transcends a simple simile or metaphor. Thus, in the ambit of the human, divine dialogue, Rosenzweig ascribed word, speech, and language as the sole means for ascertaining the divine. In this dialogue, God awakens the “Self,” the “I,” in the person, through love, disclosed in revelation and the
person, in turn, speaks to God through the language of prayer. Within this circumscribed linguistic reality, Rosenzweig unflinchingly affirms not only the presence of, but, indeed the existence of the other and that language conveys not just a human reality, but a common world. In order for Rosenzweig advance his dialogical philosophy, he conveys a hermeneutics of citation that bestows an empowered and privileged voice to common and communal language. In so doing, Rosenzweig exhibits how a hermeneutics of citation is confined to a particular community. In fact, as we’ve seen already, his hermeneutics of citation, as both a form of Jewish renewal as well as a pedagogical hermeneutic technique, is a communal affair. Rosenzweig’s philosophical hermeneutics and turn to language bespeaks the overall question of community.\footnote{137 See: James Risser, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Question of Community,” in Interrogating the Tradition: Hermeneutics and the History of Philosophy, ed. Charles E. Scott and John Sallis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 24.}

By turning to both language in general and Biblical language in particular in his “Speech-thinking,” Rosenzweig takes the position directly opposite to that of Bergson (explained earlier). For Rosenzweig, not only is all abstract philosophical contemplation as well as all mundane discourse occur within language, but that language itself is more than a simple conduit to thought. Speech-thinking, according to Rosenzweig, affirms unique qualities to thought in general. Because language, for Rosenzweig contains the embryo of thought, one could read Rosenzweig’s position on language as similar to Paul Ricoeur’s later claim that “the symbol gives rise to thought.”\footnote{138 Paul Ricoeur, trans. Emerson Buchanan, “The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought,” in The Symbolism of Evil (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 347 - 357.} Because Rosenzweig perceived language as the paradigm for thought, it, as a communal practice, exhibits classical “synchronic” elements, but because of its mechanism of change (in history), language also functions diachronically. Even though language is ubiquitous and crosses cultural barriers, Rosenzweig maintained that it still functioned parochially (as was the case in his interpretation of Hebrew language). In contrast to Jacque Derrida’s position that values writing over speech, Rosenzweig maintains that the efficacy of language lay in its capacity to situate the act of thinking within the ambit of dialogue and speech, thus transforming thought into a communal pursuit.

As a communal pursuit, the event of speech-thinking is also expressed liturgically. What makes this form of thought expressly Jewish, for Rosenzweig, is precisely the dialogue taken place within the community. As we learned
here, Rosenzweig in the second part of the Star employed the grammar of quotidian speech to interpret the space between revelation, the reader, and the revealed texts. We witness a development in the second part of the Star from Rosenzweig’s quotation of philosophical texts in the first book to his quotation of theological texts in the second book, and finally those texts in the third book that are both sacred and liturgical.