Rosenzweig's Bible

Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity

Mara H. Benjamin

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ROSENZWEIG'S BIBLE

Rosenzweig's Bible examines the high stakes, both theological and political, of Franz Rosenzweig's attempt to give new life to the Hebrew Bible and use it as the basis for a Jewish textual identity. Mara H. Benjamin's innovative reading of *The Star of Redemption* places Rosenzweig's best-known work at the beginning of an intellectual trajectory that culminated in a monumental translation of the Bible, thus overturning fundamental assumptions that have long guided the accepted appraisal of this titan of modern Jewish thought. Benjamin argues that Rosenzweig's response to modernity was paradoxical: he challenged his readers to encounter the biblical text as revelation, reinventing scripture – both the Bible itself and the very notion of a scriptural text – in order to invigorate Jewish intellectual and social life, but did so in a distinctly modern key, ultimately reinforcing the foundations of German-Jewish post-Enlightenment liberal thought.

Rosenzweig's Bible illuminates the complex interactions that arise when modern readers engage the sacred texts of ancient religious traditions.

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Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity

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Introduction: The Decline and Renewal of Scripture

Every year, new books appear offering guidance on how to read the Bible. Often written by eminent scholars for laypeople, they aim to address the yawning chasm in the public's cultural and spiritual education.[1] These volumes not only battle an educational system long in decline; they face an intellectual situation, centuries in the making, in which the Bible's singular status has eroded. Transformed beyond recognition where not simply discredited, the Bible today is largely the object either of literalist fanaticism or even-tempered apathy. In college classes, one might find the Bible taught as a literary and cultural possession to be studied, but certainly not as revelation.[2]

This state of affairs is only partly attributable to the necessary concessions to life in a pluralistic liberal democracy. More fundamentally, it reflects the undeniable power of modern science, philosophy, and history as our primary tools for making sense of the world. Simply put, the

[1] Some of these volumes even have the same title: see, for instance, James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005). Other recent additions to this genre include Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures Throughout the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005) and F. E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[2] On the tensions within recent some Jewish translations and commentaries as they navigate these categories, see Elsie Stern, "Teaching Torah in the Twenty-First Century: Three Jewish Bible Commentaries," *Prooftexts* 25, no. 3 (2005); Martin Lockshin, "The Limits of Translation," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 4 (2006). On the development of the idea of the Bible as a cultural possession, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Bible of earlier centuries is no longer accessible. Our understanding of the natural world, historical time, and the human psyche precludes the possibility of finding meaning in scripture's "simple sense."[3] The rise of modern anthropology and its investigation of the literary and oral canons of non-Western cultures and traditions have further demolished the potential for the "The Bible" to be, as its etymology would have it, The Book. The Bible is, in short, no longer "scripture," an object of veneration regarded as foundational to religious tradition and human life.

The loss of the Bible's scriptural status is not merely a byproduct of modernization. The project of modernity itself depends on discrediting, or at least dislodging, scriptural authority. Clerical political authority in pre-modern Europe was based on the claim to the exclusive power of interpreting scripture in such a way as to legitimize the authority of its interpreters. Hence Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), a foundational text of modern political life, introduces the argument for a secular religious sphere with a long and devastating critique of prophecy and of the integrity of the biblical text.[4] Spinoza's desire to puncture the authority of scripture drew its force from the dream of a free civil state not ruled by clerical authority, in which "every man may think what he likes and say what he thinks."[5] The significance of scripture was inextricable from the status ascribed to it as the revealed word of God, and the critique of scriptural revelation was closely linked, even central, to the main political project of the Enlightenment. In the world bequeathed to Europe by Spinoza, and later by Kant, revelation, whatever it was to mean, precluded access to God outside the channels of reason. The impossibility of sure knowledge of God or revelation forced both Christianity and Judaism to articulate novel grounds for their traditions, now disconnected from any self-evident mandate of revelation. Neither the Bible nor any other text could be said to be "revealed," at least in any simple sense.

[3] See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[4] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001). For a convincing reading of the Treatise and the relationship between the critique of scripture and Spinoza's political liberalism, see Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[5] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 222.

The trajectory I have outlined depends on an assumption of the absolute triumph of secularization and the inexorable decline in the cogency of revelation. But this "secularization thesis," which claimed that religious belief and the social structures that once supported it would wither away with the advent of modern political, social, and economic development, has been increasingly challenged in recent decades.[6] Since the sociological study of religion of the 1970s and, more proximately, since the American reckoning with the force of religious fundamentalism in the wake of 9/11, even intellectuals deeply skeptical of religious convictions have confronted the lasting pull of religion alongside and within modernity.[7] Religious discourse has not simply atrophied with the advent of secularism; it has undergone a transformation. It now speaks in the cadences of the very discourses – history, the sciences, literature – that once uprooted its foundations.

The persistence of theological and religious ideas – albeit often in disguised or muted forms – within secularism is attested to by the lingering aura of sacredness that hovers over the Bible. From the late eighteenth century on, religious thinkers educated in Western thought have simultaneously invited and resisted the metamorphosis of the Bible from divine revelation to product of human experience, and thus have sought to redefine revelation within the confines of what reason can know and the human subject can perceive. Modern religious thinkers inevitably, then, must work with and build upon the very ideas that disrupted the foundations of earlier religious thought. In this way they have tried to salvage the Bible with appeals to its literary or generic uniqueness, its ethical insight, or, at the very least, its indispensability in Western culture.[8] These claims testify to the persistence of the

[6] See William Swatos Jr. and Kevin Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999).

[7] Peter Berger, one of the sociologists best known for detailing the end of the "sacred canopy" of religion in modern society, himself embodied this very shift. Compare that eponymous work, published in 1967, with his subsequent reflections on religion: Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969); Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, 1st ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979); Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973).

[8] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, ix–xi.

privileged status of the Bible even in an age and culture that no longer recognizes the validity of this privilege.

This book examines the problems and the possibilities that surface from the attempt to articulate the religious force of the Bible *within* the broadly defined critical apparatus of modernity. As a work of scholarship, my contribution does not, and indeed cannot, affirm the sacredness or divinity of the Bible. Rather, its focus on a single historical figure provides a vehicle for investigating some of the strategies a modern religious thinker might employ when confronting the challenges modern thought poses to the traditional claims of a religious tradition.

I take it as a starting point that for such a thinker, the Bible can be neither affirmed without qualification as a "revealed" text nor simply dismissed as "just another text." Given these intellectual constraints, what strategies might there be for claiming a privileged place for the Bible within a community of faith? Is it not the case that the justification for a religious community's very existence stands or falls on the validity of its claim that its scripture embodies or transmits a revealed truth only accessible through it? Can any intellectually coherent foundation be built over the yawning chasm that divides traditional religious claims and modern consciousness?

The philosophical and belletristic writings of Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) offer a particularly compelling standpoint for posing these central questions. Rosenzweig's preoccupation with the Hebrew Bible and its revelatory potential enacts a dialectical relationship to modernity that is the focus of this study. His attempt to navigate the competing intellectual forces faced by any modern intellectual illustrates some of the strategies and paths open to religious thinkers generally who seek to reinvigorate religion within the context of the liberal tradition of the West. I argue that Rosenzweig's intellectual and theological project, which was guided by this quest to give new life to religion in modern thought and life, ultimately reinforced the tradition of post-Enlightenment German-Jewish liberal religious thought even as it rebelled against it. This simultaneous embrace and rejection of modernity captures the very epitome of religious thought in our own age.

Examination of the role of scripture in Rosenzweig's work affords a greater appreciation of this complex, towering figure and his work as a

whole. But even more, it offers a view into the tensions and contradictions of modern religious thought itself. The sacred status of the Bible is intimately tied to the concept of revelation, and both of these religious notions have been deeply problematized in the modern world; even the most "orthodox" thinkers have internalized the challenges to scripture and revelation that separate them from earlier traditions of thought. Thus my interest is less in the question of *how* scripture is to be interpreted and more in the fundamental question: *why* interpret scripture at all? For what range of meanings and significance might "scripture" have in a context in which revelation has been thoroughly transformed?

It was Rosenzweig's self-appointed task to revitalize the concept of scripture for skeptical modern readers, a task that implied, if not necessitated, a reformulated concept of revelation. He executed this task with tremendous ambivalence toward the intellectual strictures of the modern period. He was quite aware that to engage the Bible was to engage the problem of revelation in modern times, and for this reason his writings are remarkably insightful as to the condition and possibilities facing modern and contemporary religious thought as a whole. The result of his labors – partly successful, often diminished by polemic and evasion – took a number of forms over the years of his productive life. Part of the task of this book is to document these successes and failures and investigate why Rosenzweig chose the strategies that he did. To accomplish this, I trace Rosenzweig's evolving engagement with the Hebrew Bible throughout his works, from *The Star of Redemption* through his final literary and creative efforts, which culminated in a momentous translation of the Hebrew Bible itself. The peripatetic journey marked by these experiments with scripture reveals a thinker who simultaneously accommodated and resisted the strictures imposed by modern critical thought. Put another way, it is this very rebellion against the rationalism and historicism of the German-Jewish liberal tradition that indicates how deeply Rosenzweig was indebted to it.

THE PLACE OF SCRIPTURE IN ROSENZWEIG'S WRITING IS AN OVERLOOKED and significant dimension of his work, analysis of which shifts our understanding of this titan of modern Jewish thought. Franz Rosenzweig has

not been known for his study of or interest in the Bible.[9] Among non-scholars, he is known for his colorful and dramatic biography; to a lesser extent, for his widely cited but rarely read philosophical book, *The Star of Redemption*. I will remark only briefly on Rosenzweig's biography, which, for most readers, is familiar, and has often overshadowed his published works.[10]

[9] Numerous monographs on Rosenzweig have appeared in the last fifteen years. These include: Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Ernest Rubinstein, *An Episode of Jewish Romanticism: Franz Rosenzweig's "The Star of Redemption"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Richard Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig,* trans. Catherine Thiyani (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). For a review of trends in Rosenzweig interpretation and interest, see Peter Gordon, "Rosenzweig Redux: The Reception of German-Jewish Thought," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001).

Numerous new publications and translations of Rosenzweig's writings have also appeared in recent years; see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Barbara E. Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations, and Translators* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Franz Rosenzweig, *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, trans. Thomas A. Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000); and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die "Gritli"-Briefe: Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy* (Tübingen: Bilam, 2002).

[10] The hagiographic impulse in Rosenzweig scholarship is pervasive and unfortunate, although recent scholars have become more wary of the temptation. The publication of the "Gritli" letters, which Rosenzweig wrote to Margrit ("Gritli") Rosenstock-Huessy, has also exacerbated this danger. Rosenzweig's affair with Rosenstock-Huessy during the years of the composition of *Star* is amply documented in Rosenzweig, *Die "Gritli"-Briefe*. The significance of the letters for understanding Rosenzweig's thought has been addressed, with different emphases, in Ephraim Meir, *Letters of Love: Franz Rosenzweig's Spiritual Biography and Oeuvre in Light of the Gritli Letters* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); William Hallo, "Gibt Es So Etwas Wie Autoexegese? Franz Rosenzweigs Gritli-Briefe und der *Stern*," in *Franz Rosenzweigs "neues Denken." Band II: Erfahrene Offenbarung – in theologos*, ed. Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik (München: Verlag Karl Alber Freiburg, 2004); and Michael Zank, "The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Triangle, or, What Can We Learn from *Letters to Gritli*?: A Review Essay," *Modern Judaism* 23, no. 1 February (2003). While the letters are a treasure trove for biographers of Rosenzweig, it is crucial not to allow the letters or the affair itself overdetermine our understanding of the philosophical and theological meaning of *Star*.

Born in 1886 in Kassel and raised in an acculturated, bourgeois German-Jewish family, Rosenzweig developed an early interest in political philosophy, completing his doctorate under the great German historian and political theorist Friedrich Meinecke with a dissertation entitled *Hegel and the State* (1913).[11] The presumptions of his secular background and university training were shaken when he was twenty-six, as the result of a passionate encounter with his close confidant Eugen Rosenstock. Rosenzweig was moved by the faith of Rosenstock and experienced a spiritual crisis that led him to take religion seriously. He made plans to convert to Christianity, but the nature of these plans was unlike the *pro forma* baptisms of his many converted cousins. At the brink of his heartfelt conversion from his "philosophical," rationalistic state to a fervent and believing Christianity, Rosenzweig abruptly and dramatically made an entirely different conversion: to his native Judaism, the nominal religion of his youth, which he newly appropriated and made vibrant for himself.[12]

Rosenzweig's first major work following his dissertation and his multiple "conversions" was his monumental, even grandiose philosophical book, *The Star of Redemption*. It was composed hastily, written in large measure on postcards sent home during the end of Rosenzweig's military service in the Balkans (1918–1919) in World War I. *Star* has – unpredictably – become his best known, if most trepidatiously read, work. Following the war, Rosenzweig decided against the academic career that was expected of him and took up, instead, the directorship of the Lehrhaus Judaica, a center for adult Jewish study in Frankfurt. He tried his hand at translating Jewish liturgical texts from Hebrew into German, an interest that was likely nurtured in part by the philosophy of religious education that he had cultivated during the war. He began

[11] Rosenzweig's dissertation was originally published as Franz Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat* (München and Berlin: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1920).

[12] The account that made the story famous is found in Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1953), 23ff. Eugene Sheppard confirms the reliability of Glatzer's version in Eugene Sheppard, "'I Am a Memory Come Alive': Nahum Glatzer and the Legacy of German-Jewish Thought in America," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 1 (2004): 128–31. Rosenzweig's declaration "Also bleibe ich Jude" and his renunciation of his plan to "convert" to Protestant Christianity are often misunderstood as a rejection of all things Christian and an embrace of all things Jewish. As I will argue in the following chapters, Rosenzweig's belated construction of his own Jewish identity remained strongly influenced by his early encounters with the Christian faith that Rosenstock and his cohort embodied.

to develop a distinctive philosophy of translation, in which sacred and "canonical" texts were of central interest. This reflected his growing belief that Jewish communal identity necessitated engagement with the classical texts of Judaism.[13] From his 1920 translation of the traditional Hebrew grace after meals to his translation and commentary on the poetry of the medieval Hebrew liturgical poet Yehuda Halevi and, finally, the momentous Bible translation undertaken in collaboration with Martin Buber, Rosenzweig in his later years focused increasingly on the possibilities for liturgy and biblical texts to become the meeting ground for Hebrew and German, Jews and Christians, individual and God. These last efforts were cut short by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, from which he had progressively suffered during his last eight years and from which he died just short of age forty-three, in 1929.

Rosenzweig's engagement with scripture grew out his formative intellectual experiences – in particular, with the problem, or "crisis," of historicism that gripped Wilhelmine German intellectuals.[14] This crisis was animated by "the concern, expressed by many German intellectuals around 1900, with the allegedly damaging effects of an excessive preoccupation with the methods and objects of historical research."[15]

[13] Franz Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists . . ." in *Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken. Franz Rosenzweig: Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III*, ed. Reinhold Mayer and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984). This essay and others on Jewish education have been translated in Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, trans. N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

[14] On the roots of historicism in theology and philosophy, see Thomas A. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Alan Megill, "Why Was There a Crisis of Historicism? (Review of Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*)," *History and Theory* 36, no. 3 (1997); Georg Iggers, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995). On Rosenzweig's early engagement with the "crisis of historicism," see Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism," in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1988), especially 312–13. For additional details of Rosenzweig's decision to become a historian, see David Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 77–79. On Rosenzweig's studies and his intellectual development in the period 1906–1913, see Franks and Morgan, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 25–39; and Peter Gordon, "Angelus Novus: A Review of David Myers, *Resisting History*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 4 (2005).

[15] Megill, "Why Was There a Crisis of Historicism? (Review of Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*)," 416.

When Rosenzweig was a doctoral student, his studies with Meinecke and the neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert brought him into direct contact with thinkers who had grappled with the simultaneously alluring and troubling ethos that historical thinking engendered.[16] Among the most disturbing effects of this "excessive preoccupation" with historical consciousness and historical study was "a relativism destructive of absolute (or at least prevailing) values."[17] But in fact, as many intellectuals realized, the problem was not so much an overly zealous application of historical study but rather the natural result of its thorough application to the fundamental phenomena of contemporary society, including its values.[18] Under these conditions, "historicism" took on a distinctly pejorative association, and intellectuals became divided on whether a solution to the crisis could be found within philosophy, and specifically neo-Hegelianism, or whether some radical alternative to historicism was necessary.

[16] As pioneered by Leopold von Ranke, modern history sought to narrate historical events as they really were (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). This involved the development of standards for historical evidence and principles of reevaluation in light of new evidence; the basic assumption that the origins of all social and cultural phenomena are rooted in history; and the belief that history itself obeys certain laws, yielding the concept of analogy in understanding historical events. For Ranke, as for the other proponents of history, the historian's task was framed by the belief that "every epoch is equally close to God" (ibid.). The Wilhelmine intellectuals who were preoccupied with historicism as a problem were keenly aware of the paradox these methods contained. Ranke simultaneously secularized Christian theological understandings of divine Providence and put forth a new quasi-theological understanding of history itself.

[17] Ibid.: 416.

[18] For instance, theologian and theorist of religion Ernst Troeltsch, who of all theologians was the most interested in grappling with the implications of historicism for theology, argued that "scientific" historical thinking itself (rather than its overapplication) "dissolved verities, institutions, and ideas long held to be self-evident into the stream of historical becoming" [Ernst Troeltsch, "Die Krisis des Historismus," *Die Neue Rundschau* 33, no. 1 (1922): 573]. His proposed solution to the problem of history and theology, one of the most thoughtful attempts to solve the problem theologians faced, is nicely illustrated in his essay "On the Historical and Dogmatic Method in History," in *Religion in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). For many younger religious thinkers of the 1920s, Troeltsch became, as Myers argues, "the personification of the historicist debasement of religious faith," since he had attempted to reckon with the gravity of the historicist crisis by integrating its lessons into his own theology (Myers, *Resisting History*, 98).

The crisis of historicism predated the outbreak of World War I.[19] But the literal economic and political crisis of the war galvanized some theologians to seek a new theocratic model for the social order.[20] For the radical Protestant "dialectical theologians," the war and its millions of dead justly damned the legacy of nineteenth-century historicism and the Prussian nationalist aspirations that animated it. The primordial power of the originary moments and texts of Christianity – unmediated by overly cautious historicism – seemed to promise a resource for countering the seemingly pallid liberal theology of Adolf von Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch. A "Luther renaissance" suggested that the scriptures themselves could provide a powerful rebuke to the compromises of the earlier generation.[21] But mobilizing the sources to do so required a hermeneutic that acknowledged historicism without becoming subjugated to it. In particular, the young "dialectical theologians" sought new interpretive strategies to overcome the historical and cultural

[19] Renegade theologians such as Franz Overbeck had long decried the vacuity and arrogance of the alliance between religion and bourgeois values known as *Kulturprotestantismus*. See Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur. Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur Modernen Theologie* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919) and *Über die Christlichkeit Unserer Heutigen Theologie* (Leipzig: E.W. Fritzsch, 1873). On Overbeck, see the provocative essay Jacob Taubes, "Entzauberung der Theologie: Zu einem Porträt Overbecks," in *Vom Kult zu Kultur* (Munich: W. Fink Verlag, 1996).

[20] The spirit among the young theologians is captured in the radical Swiss pastor Friedrich Gogarten's 1920 essay "Between the Times," which became a rallying cry for young theologians disillusioned with the incapacity of liberal Christian theology to address the "crisis of culture" experienced by those who came of age during World War I. Gogarten's essay inspired the title and the tenor of the short-lived journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*, which was edited by him along with the "theologians of crisis" Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen. See Friedrich Gogarten, "The Crisis of Our Culture," in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. James McConkey Robinson (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 279–80. See also Kurt Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland: Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft Vom Ende der Aufklarung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), 212–14 and Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 175. For a collection of some of the most important essays from this circle of theologians, see Robinson, *The Beginnings*.

[21] See Karl Holl, *Was verstand Luther unter Religion?* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck], 1917); Karl Kupisch, "The 'Luther Renaissance,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 4 (1967) and James Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Savior: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther,* 1917–1933 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).

distance that they recognized as separating the reader of the day from the texts of the ancient past.[22]

Of all the Jewish intellectuals transfixed by this same anti-historicist moment, perhaps none was as clearly and explicitly indebted to the anti-historicism within Protestant circles as Rosenzweig. His studies with Meinecke had led him to an initial optimism that neo-Hegelianism could offer an answer to pernicious anti-historicism. But by 1910, Rosenzweig had turned his back on this route, and had begun to articulate the need for a robust concept of revelation as the necessary supplement, if not alternative, to historicism.[23] From this time on, Rosenzweig would argue that religion would compose the crucial piece of any response to historicism. The specific form of this response was only clarified as his result of a famous encounter with Rosenstock, after which Rosenzweig embarked upon a project of articulating a specifically Jewish concept of revelation and its workings in the world.[24]

[22] According to one of the influential voices of "crisis" or dialectical theology, Karl Barth, the historical method would not be invalidated but would be surpassed, leading to an engagement with the kerygmatic address of the "word." As Barth wrote in the 1922 preface to his *Epistle to the Romans*, "There is no difference of opinion with regard to the need of applying historical criticism as a *prolegomenon* to the understanding of the Epistle." But historical criticism alone could not yield what Barth called "genuine understanding and interpretation," which he saw in "the creative energy which Luther exercised with intuitive certainty in his exegesis [and] which underlies the systematic understanding of Calvin" [Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7]. For Barth, a return to the ancient, foundational texts of Christianity, as read with this "genuine understanding," would lead to the reorienting recognition of the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and humanity. His conviction was shared by a generation of thinkers who hoped to usher in an era in which the call of the scriptures could be heard anew.

[23] Franks and Morgan point to several important letters documenting Rosenzweig's shift in thinking from 1910 and note that "although one might have thought that Rosenzweig's turn to religion occurred in 1913, in 1910 he already thought of religion as the way to overcome the generation of 1800s deification of history." Franks and Morgan, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 31. See also Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 257–305.

[24] Rosenzweig's take on historicism in 1910 and shortly thereafter found him caught between the seductive radicalism of individual interlocutors such as Eugen Rosenstock and more moderate approaches for integrating historical thinking into revelation proposed by liberal theologians. On Rosenstock's engagement with Rosenzweig on historicism, see Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig, *Judaism Despite Christianity: The Letters on Christianity and Judaism between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 127; Myers, *Resisting History*, 86.

Rosenzweig's earliest direct response to historicism is found in "Atheistic Theology" (1914). This essay shows the degree to which, for Rosenzweig, the intellectual situations facing both Christianity and Judaism are parallel, and indeed interwoven.[25] Both the problem of historicism and its answer lie beyond denominational boundaries. Of special importance, however, is Rosenzweig's gesture toward a specifically scriptural answer to the crisis of historicism. In doing so, it indicates the direction that Rosenzweig's thought increasingly took in the coming years, which is the focus of this book.

"Atheistic Theology" begins by analyzing the "Life-of-Jesus" theology that developed over the course of the nineteenth century, the aim of which was to disentangle the teaching of Jesus Christ from the traditional metaphysics of Christian soteriology. This theology, epitomized in the identification of a "religion of Jesus" in place of a "religion about Jesus" in Adolf von Harnack's *The Essence of Christianity* (1900), served a community of Christians who no longer could bend their rational faculties to accommodate orthodox Christian doctrine about the unique person or salvific power of Jesus, or who no longer saw the need to try.[26]

As Rosenzweig noted, Harnack's theology was simply the outgrowth of a century of theological attempts to purify Christian belief of irrationality. Indeed, David Friedrich Strauss, author of the provocative and controversial *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), had assured his readers that "the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism . . . The certainty of this can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism. . . . The dogmatic significance of the life of Jesus remains inviolate."[27] Strauss was confident that relinquishing the historical reality of the mythic narratives would liberate the believer to embrace the absolute truth these narratives express. But ironically, Strauss and others undermined rather than buttressed Christian belief.

[25] Franz Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, eds. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). On Rosenzweig's historicism, see Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism"; Myers, *Resisting History*; Gordon, "Angelus Novus: A Review of David Myers, *Resisting History*"; Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*.

[26] Franz Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, eds. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 12.

[27] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1972), lii.

The "quest for the historical Jesus" had quickly become fraught with tension when a growing internalization of the laws of historical evidence and the textual problems with the gospels yielded a historical "Jesus of Nazareth" bifurcated from the decisively ahistorical "Christ of faith."[28] As Rosenzweig wryly noted, the resulting portrait of Jesus the teacher merely reflected back the idealized image for which the researchers sought elusive proof: "The life of Goethe was the secret presupposition of this life of Jesus which German-liberal theology hoped to make the focal point of faith."[29]

The significance of this matter of Christian dogma for Jewish theology was readily apparent to Rosenzweig. Just as the transformation of the figure of Jesus Christ in historicist scholarship showed the failures of German liberal theology, the transformation of the election of Israel into a *Judenvolks-Theologie* (theology of the Jewish people) had disposed of the extra-historical, providential *raison d'être* that, for centuries, had granted Jewish revelation its ongoing justification and verification.[30] For Rosenzweig, this *Judenvolks-Theologie* had created the idea of the existence of a people alone as endowed with significance, which eventually became the idea of peoplehood as "an eternal existent": the "chosen people" had become, over the course of the nineteenth century, the ideal community of humanity.[31] This redefinition of the Jewish people, in Rosenzweig's eyes, merely sought to avoid or domesticate the Jewish "scandal" of the divine actually entering into the human realm in a distinct moment and through a specific people, and for this reason should be thought of as "atheistic theology."[32] "Atheistic

[28] Albert Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1905).

[29] Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," 14.

[30] With regard to "the Chosen People," Rosenzweig remarks that the "older religiophilosophical attempts of the nineteenth century had tried to render this difficult concept unobjectionable; it had arrived at softenings of a sort similar to those carried out on the figure of Christ in classical German philosophy" (ibid., 15). "Atheistic Theology" should thus be read as a thinly veiled attack on Martin Buber's early theological writings – in particular, on Buber's romanticism and theological anthropology. Though Buber and Rosenzweig would become close friends and privileged interlocutors over the course of the next fifteen years, the 1914 essay barely conceals Rosenzweig's contempt for Buber, who was widely recognized as the spokesman for a *Judenvolks-Theologie*.

[31] Ibid., 16.

[32] Ibid., 16–17.

Theology" reveals the degree to which Rosenzweig viewed historicism as having profound implications not only in the eye of its storm, Christian theology, but in Jewish theology as well.[33] He perceptively recognized that the attempt to circumvent the profound challenges for theology had dissolved the claims that lay at the very heart of both Christianity and Judaism.

The solution Rosenzweig proposed appears in the final paragraphs of the essay. They are of particular interest, for they provide an early account of how Rosenzweig's own thinking had begun to incline toward a rereading and revitalization of Jewish sources over and against what he regarded as the depravities of humanistic theology, whether in Judaism or Christianity. Over and against the "atheistic" *Judenvolks-Theologie,* Rosenzweig countered with a reading of one of the central pieces of the daily Jewish liturgy:

> The introductory prayer to the daily reading of the Confession of Unity [the *shema*], which is older than medieval scholasticism and mysticism and which, outliving both, remains vital today, rests on the reciprocal connection between the 'unification of the concept of God through man and [the 'unification'] of the human heart through God ... Awareness of what is meant by the exchange of names, 'Jacob' for 'Israel,' has not died among us.[34] Ancient exegesis already puts it finger on the fact that the promise to be like the dust of the earth is followed by that other one, which means the same and yet sounds so different – to be like the stars of the heaven;[35] as [ancient exegesis] explains, if they rise, the one; if they fall, the other.[36] But once again: it knows what rising and falling mean and that there is no sense in speaking about rising and falling unless an absolute measure of height stands fast, outside that which rises and falls.[37]

With this passage, the tone of the first part of the essay – sober, aloof, at times acerbic – shifts into an altogether different key. Rosenzweig does not subject the Jewish classical sources to the caustic detachment he displays toward the theology of his contemporaries. Rather, one

[33] See Samuel Moyn's insightful analysis of this text in the context of Weimar theology: Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 117–22.
[34] Genesis 32:29.
[35] Genesis 13:17; Genesis 22:17.
[36] Sifre on Deuteronomy, Ekev Piskah 47. See also Franks and Morgan, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 23.
[37] Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," 21–23.

prooftext follows another as if to overwhelm the reader with the sheer force of their amassed weight, and the biblical allusions are surrounded by a reverent halo of exegetical adoration. These biblical references serve an important performative function in the essay: the unapologetic theism of the images and metaphors drawn from the liturgy and the Hebrew Bible implicitly rebuke the "atheism" of liberal theology. It is as if these words hail from a tradition that, Rosenzweig implies, is as distant from Buber's "atheistic theology" as it is from contemporary Christian theology.

Rosenzweig's use of these sources and his deliberate positioning of them at the conclusion of "Atheistic Theology" are indicative of the way he conceived of the textual riches of Judaism in the seemingly impoverished intellectual environment in which he had come of age. That is, revelation and its expression in the biblical corpus provided precisely that which had been eroded by the complete integration of historicism into the intellectual world of early twentieth-century Germany:

> For revelation establishes an Above and a Below, a Europe and Asia on the one hand, and an Earlier and Later, Past and Future on the other hand . . . That's it. *Above and Below*, in spite of Copernicus. *North, South, East and West*, rather than me simply twisting things around in order to turn right into left. *Past and Future*, rather than my just living a little earlier or a little later and having a different past, a different future. The world is ordered.[38]

The world ordered by the literature and religion of biblical Israel, Rosenzweig concluded, had an orientation in the cosmos. This literature, moreover, could be appropriated in some way: it could form an individual's orientation in the world. For these are sources that Rosenzweig claims as his own: "Awareness of what is meant by the exchange of names, 'Jacob' for 'Israel,'' has not died among us" – *us* here signaling his belonging to a people that claimed this text as its own.

I dwell on these lines because they are indicative of the strategy and mode of thinking that became central to Rosenzweig's corpus, the analysis of which is the focus of this book. "Atheistic Theology" focuses our attention on Rosenzweig's conception of how religious thought should respond to historicism. In effect, this passage suggests that the

[38] Letter 408 (to Gertud Oppenheim), May 30, 1917, in Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 413.

Jewish biblical and liturgical corpus provides the material within which a vibrant cosmology can be articulated. Of course, such an approach is hardly satisfactory for anyone not already persuaded. It is this very omission of analytic exposition that characterizes Rosenzweig's exhortative rhetorical style. The lyrical paean to and through Jewish texts papers over the real challenge of finding an intellectual and religiously coherent answer to the problems historicism posed for Judaism. Rosenzweig's insight into the profound crisis religion faced in his own time led him again and again to turn to scriptural words. Yet, as I will argue throughout the book, this "solution," which took on reactionary guises at times and progressive guises at other times, did not fully satisfy Rosenzweig himself, and its failure to do so haunted his thought.

"Atheistic Theology" was written in the period immediately following Rosenzweig's "conversion" to theistic Judaism, when he began to study Jewish philosophy and classical Jewish texts in Berlin in 1914.[39] In the years to come, the Bible for Rosenzweig came to signify more than just the alternative to historicism; it became a text that provided Rosenzweig with a focal point for thinking through the potential for a vibrant concept of revelation inside and outside modern critical thought. The various uses of and reflections on scripture in Rosenzweig's works index this shift in emphasis and in perspective as Rosenzweig moved from his philosophical writings to his late essays.

Rosenzweig's growing interest in the Hebrew Bible and other classical Jewish texts was nurtured in a context in which both Protestant and Jewish thinkers began to reexamine their classical texts in a post-historicist light. An explosion of scholarship about and translation of long-neglected Jewish texts testifies to an attitude that conceived of itself as no longer apologetic: Gershom Scholem undertook pioneering research on Jewish mysticism, studying texts that a century of Jewish scholars had dismissed as irrational. Martin Buber's early renderings of Hasidic legend and his continuing efforts to bring "Eastern" Jewish life

[39] Paul Franks and Michael Morgan give a helpful summary of Rosenzweig's studies at the Hochschule and his readings in Jewish sources in their introduction to their translation of "Atheistic Theology"; see Franks and Morgan, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 1–6. See also Rosenzweig's diary entries from May to October 1914 in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 151–76.

and thought to acculturated Jewry likewise challenged acculturated bourgeois orthodoxies. Ismar Elbogen produced important studies of Jewish liturgy, though few German Jews prayed regularly. The establishment of new publishing houses for Jewish texts and literature testified to the blossoming of Jewish literary production and to the existence of a readership hungry to consume this knowledge. It was in this period that the Academy for the Scientific Study of Judaism, outlined by Hermann Cohen, and the Lehrhaus were established, and the Hochschule where Rosenzweig had studied in 1914–1915 was revitalized.[40] It was a climate in which Jewish textual learning, along with Jewish poetry, historical study, and Hebrew, were all prized anew.[41]

Much of this drive was propelled by a rejection of the prevailing norms of the *Kulturjudentum* that had developed over the course of the nineteenth century: liberal Judaism was simply ethical-monotheistic rationalism buttressed by bourgeois cultural aspirations.[42] Rosenzweig, along with a small but influential cadre of other Jewish intellectuals, chafed at these ideals of his parents' generation, ideals that continued to influence so many in the generation of which he was part. He imagined a renewal of Judaism that would be fueled by the authentic texts of the Jewish tradition. It was a cultural moment that Michael Brenner has documented as a renaissance of Jewish cultural life that attracted acculturated Jews, who began to explore the spiritual, literary and

[40] Michael Meyer and Michael Brenner, eds., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Renewal and Destruction*, vol. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 129.

[41] Many of the cultural developments in this period, including Jewish modernist visual art and music, new interest in Jewish languages, and the creation of a new German-Jewish literature, constituted components of what Michael Brenner has called a "search for authenticity" that animated the period in which assimilation had reached its saturation point. See Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 69–128.

[42] Liberal Judaism developed in the vexed context of the "Jewish question," and of necessity served as a buttress for integration and *Verbesserung*, or civic improvement. The Weimar constitution, which did away with the last of the formal barriers on Jewish admission into all arenas of society, rendered the rationale for shaping Judaism to accommodate political liberalism and religious apathy suspect. The literature on the relationship between Jewish religious reform and the political pressures of Jews in nineteenth-century Germany is vast. Among the excellent contributions are Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 4 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); David Harry Ellenson, *After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004).

artistic heritage that, they felt, had been cast off by the previous generation.[43]

Yet within this turn to the texts of "authentic Judaism," Rosenzweig's approach was distinctive. Buber, Scholem and other Jewish scholars and teachers were motivated in part by a sense that the texts in question had been unjustly marginalized, if not ignored altogether by both scholars and laypeople. The texts that awakened their passion were indeed outside the "canon" of German-Jewish study; neither Hasidic stories nor kabbalistic texts had been considered worthy of study by the *maskilim*, the Jewish Enlighteners. For them, these texts came to represent the wellsprings of authentic Jewish thought and spiritual direction, and they sought to reinvigorate and complicate the self-understanding of the bourgeois German-Jewish worlds they inhabited by bringing to light the non-rational elements of Jewish tradition.

Rosenzweig, by contrast, was primarily concerned with the text that had played a central role in the ongoing development of German-Jewish Enlightenment thought and the struggle for Jewish integration. The Hebrew Bible, or (in Christian terms) Old Testament, was a text "shared" – albeit asymmetrically – by Jews and Christians, and thus the common foundation to which Jews appealed in their arguments in favor of emancipation.[44] As such, it attained a privileged status among Jews in the modern period, over and distinct from the rabbinic tradition that had for centuries been the lens through which the Hebrew scriptures were read. As Rosenzweig approached the Bible translation in particular, he identified and sought to address a set of political implications inherent in the Christian claim on the "Hebrew Bible."[45] For

[43] Meyer and Brenner, eds., *German-Jewish History*; Brenner, *Renaissance of Jewish Culture*.

[44] See Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Jonathan Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[45] Rosenzweig himself did not use the term "Hebrew Bible" to refer to the Jewish scriptures. I use this term here not only out of deference to scholarly convention but in this particular case to highlight Rosenzweig's political agenda, which I describe in detail in Chapter 3. On the terminology of "Hebrew Bible" vs. "Old Testament," see Christopher R. Seitz, "Old Testament or Hebrew Bible?" *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996); Eugene Fisher, "Hebrew Bible or Old Testament: A Response to Christopher Seitz," *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 2 (1997).

Rosenzweig, the Bible held untapped potential not because it was unread but because it was read incorrectly. His own efforts, he believed, were necessary to challenge the long-reigning Christian suppositions about the way scripture should be read. This challenge was a necessary component of any attempt to envision a more compelling Jewish identity. Rosenzweig's scriptural project thus bore a decisively political component and engaged the volatile dynamics of Jewish and German identities. Yet even as he challenged the tacit Jewish compact with German integration, he reaffirmed it by emphasizing the biblical, rather than rabbinic, orientation of Judaism.

In the chapters that follow, I examine several key moments in Rosenzweig's evolution as a thinker, starting with *The Star of Redemption* and ending with his last essays on biblical translation. The chapters follow the trajectory of Rosenzweig's project. Chapter 1 analyzes how and why Rosenzweig cites biblical texts within *The Star of Redemption*. I argue that Rosenzweig's concept of revelation, which forms the heart of his text, cannot be understood without closely examining the way the Bible functions as a crucial intertext.[46] Rosenzweig implicitly asserts the inextricability of revelation from scripture by folding passages from the Song of Songs, Genesis, Psalms, and elsewhere into his prose at critical junctures in what is usually considered a strictly philosophical work. Rosenzweig's concept of revelation thus depends in large part on the particular biblical allusions and citations that appear throughout the book. Yet his idea of revelation necessitated the radical reinterpretation of the biblical passages that are so fundamental to the concept itself. *Star* as a whole depends, I argue, on a vision of the particular, privileged role that biblical texts had to play in illustrating and even constructing a notion of revelation.

No Rosenzweig scholar, it would seem, has failed to offer an interpretation of *Star*, and I am no different. My consideration of *Star* is distinct from other treatments in two important respects. First, as I have indicated, my attention to the way Rosenzweig uses biblical texts in the book enables us to understand his concept of revelation with precision. In *Star*, Rosenzweig emphasizes the contentlessness of revelation: his is

[46] Rosenzweig's citation of biblical texts in *Star* has been occasionally noted in passing by a number of scholars (e.g., Gibbs, *Correlations*; Greenberg, *Better Than Wine*), but the significance of these texts has not been given its due.

a "revelation that posits nothing" [*Eine Offenbarung also muß das sein, die nichts 'setzt,' nichts aus sich heraus ins Leere schafft*];[47] a revelation "that is nothing more than revelation, a revelation in the narrower – no, in the narrowest sense."[48] Yet, at the same time, this utterly contentless revelation was represented with words taken from the Hebrew Bible, "Love is strong as death." The contradictions of this attempt to make the Bible manifest an "empty" content testify to the paradoxical impulse at work in all of Rosenzweig's encounters with the Bible: on the one hand, the Bible was to be the literal manifestation of divine revelation; on the other, revelation for Rosenzweig would always escape any definitive content. This contradiction reflects, in my view, the difficulties inherent in any modern appropriation of pre-modern religious thought.

Second, I regard *Star* as the *beginning*, not the *end*, of Rosenzweig's development as a religious thinker. *The Star of Redemption*, the volume usually referred to as Rosenzweig's *magnum opus*, is, unfortunately, often treated as the sum total of his contribution; its size alone seems to testify to its relative importance. This overestimation of *Star* reflects an understandable, though problematic, premise: since *Star* is the most imposing of Rosenzweig's post-dissertation works; since it has comprehensive, synthetic ambitions, and promises to synthesize a vast number of topics of undisputable import and breadth; and since its grand, architectural structure gives it the appearance of an intricate and perfectly arranged whole, the remainder of Rosenzweig's corpus must be merely a working-out of *Star*'s system. In fact, however, *Star*'s force gives way when set against Rosenzweig's later works, those less elaborate but more transparent and coherent writings of the 1920s. Indeed, when considered as a whole, *Star* appears to be an early, even immature experiment rather than a crowning achievement. *Star*, I contend, does not fully represent Rosenzweig's concepts of revelation, of the Jewish people, and of history as a whole, all of which were refined over the course of the next decade.

Chapter 2 examines the next substantial volume Rosenzweig produced after *Star*, entitled *Sixty Hymns and Poems of Yehudah Halevi*

[47] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften II: Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 179; Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 161.

[48] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star* 179/161.

(1924). The book consisted of a translation of and commentary on the poetry of the medieval Hebrew poet and philosopher Yehudah Halevi. Following his initial foray into Hebrew translation, in which he produced a translation of the traditional Hebrew grace after meals, the Halevi book was Rosenzweig's first major translational project.[49] Rosenzweig began his translation work shortly after taking on a formal role at the Lehrhaus, perhaps as the result of working with Jews eager to study Judaism without knowledge of Hebrew. Rosenzweig's commentary and translation focus on the role of scripture in Halevi's poetry and on Halevi himself as a model reader of the biblical text.

Out of this encounter, Rosenzweig began to conceive of the specific role scripture might play in the formation of Jewish communal identity and praxis in his own context. The Hebrew Bible and the Jewish reading of it began to form a component of Rosenzweig's eccentric political identity. Halevi's poems provided the foundation of a non-territorial "home" for German Jews in language and text. This enriched the range of cultural-political positions and identities available to Jews in Weimar Germany by introducing to them a textual component: Rosenzweig articulated a Judaism to be appropriated through language and study rather than through political organization or traditional praxis. Liturgy became emblematic of the way in which Jews had always transformed the words of the Bible into the language for contemporary individuals and for their community.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Rosenzweig's last major intellectual project, the momentous translation of the Bible that he undertook in collaboration with Martin Buber. Rosenzweig's attempt to bring the Hebrew Bible to German readers was an effort that marked the remaining years of his life. It reflected the multiple and competing social and cultural identities he held, his changing theological and intellectual commitments, and his intensified polemical stance toward Christianity. Chapter 3 examines this latter mobilization of the Bible in Rosenzweig's thought. In particular, I focus on Rosenzweig's thick ties to German culture and German-Christian theology, which are particularly visible in his treatment of Martin Luther. Rosenzweig's provocative essays from the 1920s express the hope that his Bible translation would replace

[49] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Tischdank* (Berlin: Fritz Gurlitt, 1920).

the standard text translated by Luther and thus loosen what he perceived as the Christian grip on the Bible, the German language, and German culture. The Bible, often claimed as part and parcel of the Christian German heritage, became for Rosenzweig the site for declaring the Jewish contribution to German history and culture. He hoped to articulate the Jewish contribution to modern German society on common ground – the ground not of the rabbis but of a common text. But the Bible translation was intentionally provocative and outlandish in its attempt to realize a "Hebrew in German letters."[50] Its aimed was not to "Germanize" its Jewish readers but rather to reimagine the essence of German language and German culture, in effect "Hebraicizing" them. The reconfiguring of Jewish identity thus entailed an attempt to rewrite the German cultural past.

In his last years, Rosenzweig began to confront head on some of the most thorny aspects of any attempt to revitalize scripture without the pre-modern assumptions that made scripture uniquely authoritative. Chapter 4 examines Rosenzweig's attempt to achieve this delicate balance. While he could not go so far as to claim it authoritative, he appealed to concepts that had had an important role in pre-modern hermeneutic assumptions while translating them into an innovative, contemporary idiom. He focused in particular on a number of qualities of the Bible that rendered it uniquely compelling: its unity, its "intertextual" qualities, and its characteristic literary qualities, all of which became crucial points in his attempt to present the Bible as not only a compelling text, but also as a "revealed" text. At the same time, these late writings are haunted by the thought that perhaps it is only a text's devoted readership that makes it scriptural. Rosenzweig's effort to turn this critical observation into the foundation of a new religious sensibility shows him in a careful dance between scholarly detachment and communal concern.

In my Conclusion, I assesses the way Rosenzweig's trajectory illuminates contemporary debate about the role of biblical texts in theology and religious experience. Rosenzweig's arguments, oscillating between

[50] It has often been noted that this project reflects a mirror image of Moses Mendelssohn, who translated the Pentateuch into German in the 1770s with an accompanying commentary. The trope of the arc from Mendelssohn to Buber-Rosenzweig has been thoughtfully analyzed in Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 179.

phenomenological accounts of scriptural language, on the one hand, and sociological accounts of scriptural authority, on the other, anticipate trends in late-twentieth century theology. Likewise his sometimes polemical, sometimes measured way of handling the competition between Protestant and Jewish claims on scripture foreshadow debates in our own era between Jewish and Protestant biblical theologians. In addressing the legacy of Rosenzweig's effort to revive and critically examine scripture, we can assess the ongoing viability and problems of engaging with scripture in the modern age.

Thus, this book furnishes the reorientation of our understanding of Rosenzweig's corpus that a more comprehensive, and thus more accurate, understanding of his work demands. At the same time, the book deals with the ways in which liberal religious thinkers conceive possible meanings of and relationships to the concept of revelation and the limitations that even the most would-be radical thinkers face in a post-Enlightenment era.

A LAST WORD ABOUT THE TERM "SCRIPTURE" IS IN ORDER. I HAVE chosen it as one of the central topics of this book. But it is a word whose meaning, at least in this day and age, is far from transparent. Throughout this book, I will consider the idea of the Bible as scripture. But for previous generations, this phrase would be redundant; for centuries, the word scripture – or rather Scripture – *was* the Bible.

"Scriptura" simply means "something written," and in the Latin-speaking West, the "written thing." *Scriptura* was the Latin equivalent – but not direct translation – of the Greek *ta biblia*, or "the books," which likewise meant the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint and the Greek scriptures commonly called the New Testament. These Latin and Greek terms are those of the Christian West, and so "Scripture" was taken to mean the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament" together. (Jewish terms for the Hebrew Bible include *miqra'* ["that which is read [aloud]"] and *Tanakh*, an abbreviation for *Torah* ["instruction," i.e., the Pentateuch], *Neviim* ["prophets"], and *Ketuvim* ["writings"].) In short, the Bible was the only book worthy of that name. It is this singularity, and more, that is captured in the word "Scripture" as it has traditionally been used.

My decision to break from convention and refer to scripture with a lower-case 's' reflects my recognition that the very meaning of the word has undergone a powerful transformation. Scripture no longer refers to a body of texts identical with the Jewish or Christian bibles. The parameters of scripture, once assumed to be contiguous with the canonized bodies of literature traditionally held to be sacred in Judaism or Christianity, have been irreversibly expanded. Certainly since the publication of Max Müller's *The Sacred Books of the East* at the turn of the twentieth century, educated readers in the West have become accustomed to the expanded reference point for "scripture" and "sacred text," recognizing that many literate cultures have produced texts they regard as somehow "scriptural," and that oral cultures also treasure sacred story and song.[51] Moreover, with the discovery of the sacred texts and oral traditions of other cultures, "scripture" has come to include "religious" and "non-religious" texts central to a cultural or literary tradition. But these observations only render the question of what we now mean by scripture more visible. If it is not a specific body of texts, what is it?

James Kugel, in his work on the formative period in the creation of the scriptures of the Jewish and Christian canons, has identified four basic interpretive assumptions held by the earliest interpreters of the books that came to be read, venerated, and used as scripture. For ancients, he argues, the Bible was first and foremost a "fundamentally cryptic document" that required special rules of interpretation; second, scripture was understood not simply as a record of events but as a text whose purpose was to instruct its readers in the present. Third, scripture was a text understood to be "perfect and perfectly harmonious," thus precluding any error, and demanding instead, in cases where the text appeared to be disharmonious, a different insight into its true meaning. Finally, scripture was understood to be "divinely sanctioned, of divine providence, or divinely inspired."[52] Other scholars have pointed to numerous alternative or additional factors, such as the sensual realm of experience – touching, hearing, and adoring the scriptures – as critical elements of a more generalized definition of "scripture."

[51] F. Max Müller, *The Sacred Books of the East*, American ed., 12 vols. (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1897).

[52] James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

Certainly the relative unavailability of books in the West before the advent of the printing press conspired to lend the biblical corpus its unique stature in the eyes of the faithful.[53]

All of the assumptions Kugel identifies as central to the concept of "scripture" have lost their plausibility to a great degree in the transition to modern ways of reading and interpreting texts. Thus we have looked to other definitions. For instance, William Graham, a theorist of scripture and a scholar of the Qur'an, has argued that "scripture is not a literary genre but a religiohistorical one." That is, scripture describes the relation that a particular set of people have to a written or oral text rather than a quality inhering to the text itself.[54] If we accept this definition, then some of the problems I mentioned earlier concerning the challenges to scripture become obvious: what happens to our definition of scripture if its meaning is dependent upon a belief in its unique qualities when that belief is attenuated or no longer possible? Can scripture be revived or convincingly redefined in this modern and post-modern era of ours? These are precisely the problems Rosenzweig addressed, and they are problems that, after yet another century, we still face. It is my hope that the present study can make a contribution to both our understanding the significance of these problems and to our own encounter with scripture today.

[53] See William Graham, "Scripture," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 6; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 891–3.

[54] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

1

Scripture in *The Star of Redemption*

In a long letter to his friend and physician Richard Koch written a year before his death, Rosenzweig reviewed the path leading from the intellectual and religious crisis of his young adulthood to his final project, the Bible translation. This retrospective of his trajectory gives us a lens into Rosenzweig's own view of his writings and life ambitions. In Rosenzweig's eyes, his intellectual career represented the unfurling of a single continuous concern. Where the reader today might see a diverse corpus, including a philosophical-theological hybrid tome, translations of medieval Hebrew poetry, essays on education, and other miscellany, Rosenzweig himself saw coherence:

> Things in life don't happen so decisively. One slips into new epochs of one's life and the so-called "decision" is usually merely the number of a sum whose terms have long since been drawn up by life. . . .
>
> My autobiographical philosophy of history (retrospective, like all philosophy of history) runs as follows: upon suddenly becoming converted to philosophy in 1913 . . ., the plan for my "lifework" came to me. I must have notes for it somewhere, probably in cards with notes on them which I sent (from corporal Rosenzweig) to Mr. Franz Rosenzweig in Kassel; I would provide details for the plan only once I was seventy, as before then I certainly wouldn't have amassed the necessary knowledge. The plan was for a book *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*, as the *Star* later became – but in the form of a Bible commentary; hence the prolonged studies. I believe it was to have three volumes: the first would concern the weekly sections from the Torah; the second, the prophetic writings that accompany them; and third, the holiday readings and special scrolls. Ten years ago, I very hastily wrote the commentary without the text (luckily, as it turned out). And now (strangely enough, as is fairly evident from the

above), I've come to the text itself, leaving out the commentary. From which we say that in every case, what is omitted is, of course, always latent within . . . .[1]

The Star of Redemption (written 1918–1919, published 1921) can indeed be described, for better and for worse, as a book "on everything and various other items": its ambitious, almost architectural construction brings art, philosophy, theological speculation, even mathematics to bear in its proposal for the proper mode of apprehending humanity, God, and the world. But what strikes us about Rosenzweig's reflection, at least according to this late and retrospective recollection, is that the original blueprint for his best-known book envisioned it as a Bible commentary. Traditionally, a Bible commentary always accompanied, and remained subordinate to, the biblical text itself; this subordination was made visually manifest by printing the latter in larger typeface or in the center of the page. Rosenzweig, fully aware of the divergence between his early writings and any conventional commentary, notes in this letter that *Star* was a "commentary without a text." And although *Star* "became," as Rosenzweig put it, the work known to others as his *magnum opus*, his tone suggests that it was, for him, mere prolegomenon to a work never fully completed. In Rosenzweig's own view, his ambitions exceeded his grasp: *Star* did not fulfill the original aims set for it. The book commonly accepted as Rosenzweig's greatest achievement was thus, according to its author, the initial sketch for a yet grander, more all-encompassing life work that would be firmly tethered to the Bible.

The Star of Redemption was Rosenzweig's first substantive attempt to articulate a new language for and method of doing philosophy. Thus it represents the end of his strictly philosophical production and, at the same time, the beginning of an intellectual endeavor that investigated the possibilities of other modes of thinking. Scripture played the key role in this effort. It formed the bridge between *Star*, the endpoint of Rosenzweig's philosophical writing, and his post-philosophical translation projects. Rosenzweig chose to harness the words of the Bible for this last strictly philosophical work to make the role of revelation

[1] Letter 1213 (September 2, 1928) to Richard Koch in Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), 2: 1196.

dramatically manifest. Scripture was to underscore the unassimilability of revelation and the definitive difference it created from the philosophical system in which he had been trained.

Scripture throughout *Star* is presented as the literal word of God. This very notion strikes us as at once deeply fideistic and, in the modern context, deeply reactionary. But as I shall argue in this chapter, Rosenzweig was neither. Instead, I view Rosenzweig as an utterly late-modern figure whose presentation of scripture as the word of God was a compelling conceit that enabled him to reinvent both revelation and the Bible for a modern sensibility. In brief, I claim that scripture in *Star* functions as testimony to the fact of revelation. Revelation, in turn, is understood as an unopposable, even violent irruption from God into the human plane, and constitutes a force that demands response from the individual human being. Thus Rosenzweig's use of scripture in his account of revelation aims to focus attention on the primacy and irreducibility of the divine/human relationship.

Rosenzweig's use of scripture immediately generates several tensions. First, in the effort to emphasize the opposition between revelation and what Rosenzweig calls "pagan" philosophy – by which Rosenzweig meant "Hegelian" philosophy – Rosenzweig made scripture into a foil for "philosophy." This move granted scripture a status removed from the realm of critique, and Rosenzweig thus authorized himself to speak in a voice that sought to overwhelm and silence critical questions. In addition, Rosenzweig's wish that *Star* be read not only as a new kind of philosophical text but also as a new reading of scripture necessitated the artful reworking of the biblical text and its poetic "misprision," to use Harold Bloom's term.[2] Rosenzweig's carefully drawn links to and exploitation of the text of the Bible at times contradict the principle of a "contentless" revelation that he asserts as a central point in the text, particularly in the heart of *Star*, on which this chapter focuses. Rosenzweig's quest to redefine revelation within the intellectual confines of modern thought employed scripture in sometimes subtle, sometimes flamboyant ways that sometimes undermine his broader agenda.

[2] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Star marks a revolt against but also within the philosophical foundations of liberal religious thought. The considerations that formed the boundaries of Rosenzweig's audacious misreading of scripture were determined by the navigation of this double stance of rebellion and accommodation. *Star* marks Rosenzweig's early religious thought as an attempt to surmount, rather than merely respond to, the challenges put toward scripture in the post-historicist, post-rationalist era.

LANGUAGE IN AND OF THE *STAR*: SOME ORIENTING REMARKS

Rosenzweig made a number of attempts to explain *The Star of Redemption* to its puzzled readers in the years after penning it on postcards sent home from the Macedonian front in World War I. These reading aids, however, are as likely to confuse intrepid readers as much as guide them. Is the book really about the primacy of "common sense" over and above "philosophy," as *Das Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand* (1921) would have us understand it?[3] Is it about a "new thinking" that would integrate our own everyday experience into philosophy?[4] Or is it about the importance of speech, dialogue, and interpersonal relationships rather than abstract ideas?[5] Simply to catalogue the major debates about interpreting this work could easily occupy a lengthy study of its own.

I view *Star* as an ambitious performance that simultaneously engages and rejects the philosophical tradition of neo-Hegelianism and, in particular, its historicism. The centrality of revelation to the structure and

[3] Franz Rosenzweig, *Das Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand* (Düsseldorf: J. Meltzer, 1964); Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[4] See Franz Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken: Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum *Stern der Erlösung*," in *Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken. Franz Rosenzweig: Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984).

[5] A number of interpretations have stressed this element as the central contribution of *Star*, though with differing emphases; see especially Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

development of *Star* indicates the importance of understanding how a historically specific theological outlook shaped Rosenzweig's positioning of revelation vis-à-vis philosophy.

As Leora Batnitzky, Robert Gibbs, and others have shown, human relationships and the religious community figure prominently in *Star*, and Rosenzweig's understanding of how revelation generates new social configurations clearly forms an important element of the book. However, I do not think *Star's* center of gravity lies in the role it grants to "ethics," broadly construed as an engagement with or mandate for interpersonal obligation. Rather, I believe that human relationships (which cannot, in *Star*, be identified with "ethics" without serious qualification) take on their particular configurations as a direct response to revelation. I regard the heart of Rosenzweig's project in *Star* to be the positing of the foundational importance of revelation as mediated by the words of the Bible. Thus, in what follows, I attend primarily to Part II of *Star*, and especially to the second section, in which Rosenzweig details the workings of revelation. This section is crucial to understanding the significance of Part I and Part III.

To introduce the approach I will take in this chapter, I offer one example of how attention to scripture and scriptural language can aid in reading *Star* as a whole and in making one's way through a range of conflicting interpretations. *Star* begins with Rosenzweig's provocative declaration that "All knowledge of the All begins with death, with the fear of death."[6] More than 400 pages later, the closing words of *Star* are "INTO LIFE" [*INS LEBEN*], a phrase visually set apart from the preceding text. The juxtaposition between death, invoked in the first words of the book, and life, invoked at its end, has long struck readers as significant. But the meaning of this juxtaposition is open to debate: does the book affirm "everyday life" or, to the contrary, propose that God cannot be found in this life at all? Nahum Glatzer's long-influential reading placed *INS LEBEN* in diametrical opposition to the first words of the book, a reading he found validated in the *Büchlein*. He argued

[6] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften II: Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 3. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 3. Hereafter, all citations from *The Star of Redemption* will cite the page number first from the Nijhoff edition and then from Hallo's English translation.

that the final words of the *Star* showed that Rosenzweig valorized everyday life and generally affirmed "life" over and against the "death" whence springs the philosophical tradition against which he supposedly rebelled.[7] Other readers have challenged Glatzer's sanguine pronouncement that *Star* affirms ordinary life by focusing on the inaccessibility of the "countenance" at the end of *Star,* describing it as a mystical vision rather than a return to ordinary life[8] or a life directed toward death.[9]

How we read this juxtaposition is significant for understanding the trajectory of *Star* as a whole. But how indeed to read it? A neglected set of clues can be detected in the biblical passages that Rosenzweig subtly interweaves into his prose in the concluding paragraphs of *Star*. Here is his description, in the third-to-last paragraph of the book, of the divine face, and in particular, the lower point of the "star," which corresponds to God's mouth:

The mouth is the consummator and fulfiller of all expression of which the countenance is capable, both in speech as, at last, in the silence behind which speech retreats: in the kiss. It is in the eyes that eternal countenance shines for man; it is the mouth by whose word man lives. But for our teacher Moses, who in his lifetime was privileged only to see the land of his desire, not to enter it, God sealed this complete life with a kiss of his mouth. Thus does God seal and so too does man.[10]

A rabbinic midrash alluding to Moses' death is seamlessly woven into this passage. Deuteronomy 34:5 states that Moses died at the command (*'al pi*, lit. "at the mouth") of God. Deuteronomy Rabba 11:10, playing on the literal words *'al pi*, describes the moment at which God took

[7] Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1953), 101–02. More recently, Peter Gordon nuances Glatzer's claim, but essentially agrees that *Star* moves from the attack of Hegelian totalities, which ignore the constant possibility of death, toward a reassembled All "that thematizes and then returns to the object known prior to questioning"; see Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 174ff. For a critique of Glatzer and Else Rachel-Freud's reading of *Star's* "*INS LEBEN*" as a rejection of death, see Zachary Braiterman, "'Into Life'??! Franz Rosenzweig and the Figure of Death," *AJS Review* 23, no. 2 (1998).

[8] Elliot Wolfson, "Facing the Effaced: Mystical Eschatology and the Idealistic Orientation in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig," *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 4 (1997).

[9] Braiterman, "'Into Life'??!," 212.

[10] See Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 471/423.

Moses' soul as a kiss of the divine mouth. Thus the "kiss" to which Rosenzweig refers, through the midrash, is a kiss bestowed by God that takes away the soul rather than giving it life.

The midrash, in Rosenzweig's hands, serves as an indication that the mystical vision of God's countenance must be understood as a moment that can only come at the end of life: the true "life" toward which the end of the book gestures is a life beyond that of this world. Once we recognize the implication that true life follows earthly life and death, rather than being found within daily life, we see traces of it elsewhere as well: in the conclusion of Part III, volume II, Rosenzweig develops the idea that "Life becomes immortal [*unsterblich*] in the eternal song of praise of redemption . . ." He describes this "immortal life" in the Talmudic words used to describe the world-to-come: "The pious ones sit with crowns on their heads, and behold [*schaun*] the radiance of the revealed God [*Gottheit*]."[11] This reward for the righteous is neither in nor of this world, but is a reward given communally after individual death, on the "long day" at the end of time. The allusions make it clear that *Star* does not offer a vision of holiness within everyday life, but precisely the opposite.[12]

I have dwelt on this example to show that the biblical and midrashic passages woven into *Star* do not merely illuminate philosophical or literary points that are independent of these citations. Rather, they actually constitute integral clues to understanding the book's purpose and main themes. In the rest of this chapter, I will flesh out this claim by looking at the variety of ways in which Rosenzweig deploys scripture in *Star*. But before doing so, I offer some orientating remarks as to the general features and argument of this profoundly complex and often confusing book.

The Star of Redemption has been long understood – to the extent that it has been understood at all – as a quasi-philosophical book that set out to challenge the assumptions of the philosophical tradition of German Idealism in which Rosenzweig had been educated.[13] The scholarly disagreement comes about with the question of the goal Rosenzweig had in

[11] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 282/253.

[12] On "everydayness" (*Alltäglichkeit*) in Rosenzweig, see Gregory Kaplan, "Hallowing Days: The Secular and the Sacred for Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig" (doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2002).

[13] One of the early influential interpretations that posited this view was Karl Löwith, "Martin Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig, or Temporality and Eternity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3 (1943).

mind in laying down this challenge. In what direction did he want philosophy to go? Did he want to leave it behind entirely? The inadequacies of Hegelian metaphysics are clearly at issue for Rosenzweig; on the very first page of the book, he objects to the "contempt" of Hegelian philosophy for the individual's confrontation with mortality and its failure to recognize the divinely ordered structure of the cosmos. But what else?

I have found that the most accessible way to begin to grasp *The Star of Redemption* is to think about it structurally. It is composed, in true neo-Hegelian fashion, in three Parts, and within each of these Parts are three smaller "books," each of which describes three basic elements of reality and their relationships with one another. These elements are God, human being, and world, and for Rosenzweig it is crucial that these elements remain distinct, for he regarded a major flaw of Hegel's philosophy as that of unifying these elements into a hubristic synthesis that aimed to "comprehend the All."[14] Part I concerns what Rosenzweig terms the "pagan" cosmos – that is, the world examined as understood in an atheistic, or pagan, epistemology. The "protocosmos" [*Vorwelt*] or "pagan" universe described in Part I is defined by the failure of the three basic elements of the cosmos to interact with one another: God is unknowable, the world is mere idea, and the human being can exist at most as a limited, unrelated "self." This failure is directly tied to this "pagan" world's being untouched by revelation; the resulting reality is self-enclosed and static.

Rosenzweig's persistent metaphor for the non-relatedness of the elements of the cosmos is silence; logic, as opposed to speech, is the coin of the non- or pre-revelatory realm. At best, the three elements speak a "speech of the unspeakable" [*Sprache des Unaussprechlichen*].[15] Robert Gibbs has rightly called this "speech of the unspeakable" a "proto-language" that is associated with non-linguistic forms of expression such as art and mathematics.[16] The non-linguistic nature of these "languages" is intended to underscore the solitude that, for Rosenzweig, pervades the world without revelation: "The realm of art everywhere gives the ground upon which the self can grow, but every self is completely solitary; art can nowhere create a true plurality [*wirkliche Mehrheit*] of selves, even though it makes for the possibility for the awakening of selves

[14] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star* 3/3.
[15] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star* 139/125.
[16] Gibbs, *Correlations*, 92–94. See Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star* 167/151.

everywhere: the self that awakens knows only itself. In other words, the self remains, in art's world of appearances, a self – not a soul."[17]

For Rosenzweig, the hallmarks of this cosmic picture are negativity and privation. He reinforces this understanding of paganism with a series of literary texts that confirm the unrealized nature of the human being consigned to a world without revelation.[18] Just as the human being of Part I is "silent," so too the texts that represent the pagan world are characterized as "mute speech," "monologue," or "speechless."[19] In the final pages of Part I, Rosenzweig gestures to Li Po and Lao-Tzu, Faust, Juliet, Gilgamesh, and Euripides: the radically diverse intellectual and cultural worlds these characters and authors represent share, for Rosenzweig, a common "paganism." By this he means a supposed enclosure within the 'It'-world rather than the 'Thou'-world of "relation." These "pagan" texts lack the relation to the divine Other that produces the possibility of a true self, or what Rosenzweig will call the "soul":

There are verses of the great Li-Po that no translator would dare to render without the word 'I.' But at the same time, as is characteristic of the Chinese language, in the original they remain without any hint of any sort of personality, and are thus totally beholden to the 'It'-form (81/75).[20]

Rather than juxtapose "philosophy" with the Bible by referencing classic *philosophical* texts in Part I, Rosenzweig consistently engages *literary* texts as the locus for *theological* truths. The portrayal of "pagan" texts lays the groundwork for a theological categorization of verbal expression in which the privileged language of scripture can be

[17] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star* 89/81.

[18] In the "New Thinking" (1925), Rosenzweig softened the ambivalent valence given to "paganism" and even admitted its "truth" to a greater degree than in *Star*: "Paganism is certainly not merely a religiophilosophical monster for grownups, as it was for the orthodoxy of earlier centuries. . . . Rather it is no more and no less than the truth. Admittedly, the truth in an elemental, invisible, unrevealed form. So therefore, anytime it wants to be not elemental but the whole, not invisible but form, not secret but revelation, it turns into a lie. But as an element and secret within the whole, the visible, the revealed – it is everlasting" (Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken,"), 147.

[19] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 89–90/82.

[20] Rosenzweig's comments here on Chinese culture, like those on Islam, are clearly informed by a deep-seated and unreflective cultural prejudice that is pervasive in the book. For an incisive early critique of Rosenzweig's portrayal of Islam and his negative discussion of it in *Star*, see Jacob Taubes, "The Issue between Judaism and Christianity: Facing up to the Unresolvable Difference," *Commentary* 16 (1953).

showcased. Rosenzweig's denigration of the world of "pagan" literature in Part I serves as a foil for the revelatory texts – texts culled from the Bible – that he introduces in Part II.

The second two Parts of *Star* demonstrate how an encounter with God's revelation transforms this "pagan" understanding of the world. Part II shows how the elements of the cosmos, which had been "static" or "isolated" from each other in the pagan world, are animated and become dynamic in a world in which God is understood to have created the world and the human being within it, to reveal himself to the individual soul, and to have set in motion the longing for and ability to bring about redemption.[21] Again, language is central to this drama. As Rosenzweig writes in the introduction to Part II, just as "philosophy becomes a prognostication of revelation," so too "the language of logic is the prognostication of this real language of grammar." Otherwise put, the "language prior to language" of Part I now becomes "living speech."[22]

Part II of *Star* describes how revelation transforms each of the three "elements" and brings them into contact with the others. The crucial element is the intrusion of God into the human soul, and the resulting transformation of the human being into a "soul" that has the capacity to encounter God. Indeed, Rosenzweig presents this transformation as the essence of revelation itself. Linguistic and literary metaphors once again explain how the self's muteness, broken by the call from God, falls away as the human being enters into "speech." Speech thus indicates not ordinary

[21] The gendering of God as male and the soul as female is essential to the heterosexual erotic encounter that Rosenzweig employs to describe revelation. To the degree that scholarship has focused at all on this point, feminist scholars disagree on the significance of Rosenzweig's assignation of gender to God and soul and its heteronormative implications; some commentators draw attention to Rosenzweig's caveat, in *Star*, Part II, Book II, that the divine and the human erotic dramas are distinct. Rosenzweig states, "It is only to the soul and the love of God that all this [God as (active, male) lover, soul as (passive, female) beloved] applies in the strict sense. Between man and woman, the roles of giver and receiver of love pass back and forth . . ." (*Stern/Star* 189/169; see Leora Batnitzky, "Dependence and Vulnerability: Jewish and Existentialist Constructions of the Human," in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson [Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).] Rosenzweig's brief qualification notwithstanding, the rigidly imagined gender roles propel the logic of this section. Braiterman has investigated the normative implications of this schema, especially in juxtaposition to the exclusively homosocial male world envisioned by the third Part of *Star*, in Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[22] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 121/108–109.

dialogue but the meeting of the human and the divine; indeed, the biblical sources of Rosenzweig's "dialogue" between human being and God that I will detail later imply that human speech is not the spontaneous expression of one's individuality but a highly orchestrated, even scripted, movement, a dialogue that is the same every time it occurs. The soul then finds others *to* whom and eventually *with* whom to speak, and the resulting community is correlated with yet a further stage of linguistic production: singing. Rosenzweig describes revelation, or the encounter between the human soul and God, as a dialogue, and later called the topic of *Star's* second volume "grammatical" or "speech-thinking" – terms he used as synonyms for "the new thinking" that he named as the heart of his philosophical contribution.[23] These appellations that focus on speech and dialogue are Rosenzweig's shorthand for what he saw as the rebuke and corrective to Hegelian thought. In addition to its dangerous aspirations of comprehending the All, Hegel's *Geist* was viewed by Rosenzweig as impersonal, spurning both individuals and the time that allows their encounter with one another to take place; Rosenzweig's own concept of "speech," by contrast, indicated the revelatory encounter, mediated by language, between God and the individual human being.

Revelation, for Rosenzweig, is formally distinct from but causally linked to the cosmic drama of redemption. The soul transformed by revelation longs for the full presence of God, but realizes that God may not be possessed, or loved, in a reciprocal manner to that which she experienced from God. (On the gender of the soul, see note 21.) The soul thus turns to the "neighbor," or fellow human being, and joins with her to praise God (Part II, Book III). The primary focus of Part II is thus the divine-individual relationship, with the relationships between and among human beings – the realm of ethics – emerging secondarily, as the consequence of the failure to experience God's redemption in the world. Ethics, or the turn to the "neighbor," is thus not a positive but a negative consequence of the experience of revelation.[24]

[23] Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken," 151. "The New Thinking" was written over five years after Rosenzweig completed *Star*, and should not be read, as it often is, as a simple recapitulation of the contents of *Star*. Rather it is a restatement shaped by the years of activity Rosenzweig had devoted, in the intervening years, to other efforts (such as the Lehrhaus and various translation projects).

[24] This observation forms part of a corrective to an overly "Levinasian" understanding of ethics in *Star*; cf. Gibbs, *Correlations*, 107.

Part III shifts from the creation of the soul, its encounter with God, and its turn toward the neighbor to the two religious communities that, Rosenzweig held, were uniquely built on God's revelation and thus equipped to bring about redemption. Rosenzweig describes how the Jewish people proleptically anticipate redemption by existing outside of history, thus bearing witness to God's past, present, and future redemption; Christianity brings this witness to the rest of the world. Part III uses liturgy as the expression of the communal life of the Jewish people and as the structure for the Christian way. Both communities thus participate in forms of socio-religious praxis that create a new kind of silent, yet redemptive, *ersatz*-"language."[25] Each community, through its religious celebrations, goes beyond the pinnacle of linguistic expression as described in Part II. The very end of *Star* culminates in a vision that is completely a-linguistic: a (silent) vision of God's face, which maps onto the form of the eponymous star. The trajectory of *Star*, if we use language and literary form as an index, is clear: *Star*'s pilgrim is guided through a-linguistic parabola in which both beginning and end are characterized by silence [see table below].

Section of Star	*Characterization of Human Existence*	*Type of Speech*	*Artistic/Literary Expression*
Part I, Book I–II	Human being	Silence	Plastic arts
Part I, Book III	Self	Muteness	"Pagan Literature" (Goethe, others)
Part II, Book I	Self	Speaking	Genesis (selections)
Part II, Book II	Soul		Song of Songs (selections)
Part II, Book III	Neighbor, member of a group	Singing	Psalms (selections)
Part III, Book I–II	Jewish people/ Christian "way"	Gesture, ritual	Liturgy of the holidays of the year
Part III, Book III	[None]	Silence	[Vision of the divine countenance/the eponymous "star"]

[25] Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Steven Kepnes, "Liturgical Reasoning: From Buber's 'Relational Field' to Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*" (Boston: AJS Conference, 2003).

Thus *Star* correlates specific forms of linguistic and literary expression with different modes of human possibility and apprehensions of the cosmic order. In each of these instantiations of human cognition, these forms of expression are referred to metonymically, in the form of specific types of texts. This structural observation becomes particularly important as we enter deeper into the role of specific biblical texts within the central sections of *Star*. Biblical texts are literally given the only "speaking" role within *Star*, and this indicates that they will be charged with the task of embodying revelation itself.

The remainder of this chapter will show that what Rosenzweig later termed *Sprachdenken*, or "speech thinking," centered not on speech in general but on biblical speech – that is, on language culled from the Bible and set to work in imaginative, often radical ways. For Rosenzweig regarded the words of the Bible as uniquely capable of expressing revelation and, as such, as forming the foundation of a new philosophy. But in contending that *revelatory* speech is *revealed* speech, Rosenzweig faced the task of reappropriating and thus rewriting the Bible. This he did to create a revelation suited to an intellectual world weary of historicism and rationalism, yet one that – even in the turbulent times in which Rosenzweig penned *Star* – could not altogether dispense with these critical tools.

REWRITING THE BIBLE

Any classification of the use of the Bible in *Star* is sure to fall short, for Rosenzweig's usage of it intentionally transgresses the norms of conventional usages. It is tempting to call the odd relationship between biblical text and Rosenzweigian extrapolation "midrash."[26] But classifying Rosenzweig's textual play as midrash locates Rosenzweig within the classical Jewish interpretive tradition in ways that occlude his multiple transgressions of the interpretive conventions of midrash. Instead of "midrash," I suggest borrowing Géza Vermès' idea of "the rewritten Bible" as a concept that can help us analyze the complex role and status of scripture within *Star*.[27] The concept of a "rewritten Bible," generally

[26] Cf. Gibbs, *Correlations*, 97; Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better Than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 31.

[27] Géza Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies*, 2nd, revised ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 67–126. I thank Steven Fraade for suggesting the applicability of this concept to the reworkings of biblical text in *Star*.

used to refer to a variety of post-biblical Jewish literature, from the Book of Jubilees to Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and other lesser-known texts, refers to narrative texts that follow the same course as biblical narratives but reinterpret them substantially. Philip Alexander's identification of the boundaries of this literary genre, and of the following characteristics in particular, bears special mention: first, "rewritten Bible texts follow the Bible serially, in proper order, but they are highly selective in what they represent"; second, "the intention of the texts is to produce an interpretive reading of Scripture. . . . The commentary is, however, indirect, and its full significance can only be grasped if the original is constantly borne in mind. They carry on an intense, if silent, dialectic with the original"; third, "the narrative form of the texts means, in effect, that they can impose only a single interpretation on the original. The original can be treated only as monovalent"; and fourth, the narrative form "precludes making clear the exegetical reasoning."[28] The new text remains tethered to the biblical text it seeks to replace, but "it is *as if* the biblical text itself is replaced by its interpretive retelling."[29] Rewritten biblical texts contributed to the formation of early notions of scripture itself, for they performed a relationship of both fidelity to and betrayal of them and thus asserted the fundamental authority of the biblical texts while legitimizing the creative retelling of them.

The phenomenon of rewriting the Bible is hardly limited to intertestamental literature. Part II of *Star* offers a contemporary version of this antique phenomenon. The biblical texts that occupy the heart of *Star* anchor the text and, at the same time, are reconstituted in a strong misreading that gives them new shape and meaning. Rosenzweig integrates the biblical text into *Star* by means of two broadly defined strategies: the explicit use of biblical texts and the subtle weaving of

[28] Philip S. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars, SSF*, eds. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 116–18. Alexander lists nine characteristics of "the rewritten Bible," and not all of them correspond to Rosenzweig's use of scripture in *Star*. My use of this term is not to claim an identity between the ancient phenomenon that Alexander describes and Rosenzweig's project but rather to highlight elements of *Star* that have been eclipsed from view.

[29] Steven Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 2.

"unmarked" biblical references into his own prose. These citations of, allusions to, and wholesale reworking of scripture attest to Rosenzweig's vision of scripture as fulfilling a unique and irreplaceable purpose within his own philosophical tome. They offer evidence of his hope that biblical language, properly harnessed, could offer an unmediated source of truth that would challenge the Hegelian philosophical tradition.

Just as with the rewritten biblical texts of ancient times, *Star* both reinforces and undermines the authority of the biblical text. Yet the question of the text's authority had special urgency for Rosenzweig. The manifold forms of scriptural reflection, citation, and allusion in *Star* create a text that aims to *be* rather than to claim or present a rewritten scripture, one that reworks elements of the Bible into a radical new form and weaves them together into a new whole. These forms, each of which I analyze in detail in this chapter, include the overt and covert citation of biblical passages and the tacit presentation of a "canon within the canon" that reflects Rosenzweig's perspective on revelation. The very boldness and force of these multiple uses of scripture belie the same erosion of the authority of scripture against which Rosenzweig's "rewritten Bible" struggles.

Three separate passages within Part II offer the most obvious, and most inviting, starting places for analyzing Rosenzweig's engagement with and "rewriting" of scripture. Each of these subsections is entitled "The Word of God" and occurs at the climax of the three Books of Part II, titled respectively "Creation," "Revelation," and "Redemption."[30] These "Word of God" passages call attention to the three biblical texts that guide each of the volumes within Part II: Genesis 1, Song of Songs, and Psalm 115, respectively. The three "Word of God" passages use the three biblical texts to forge a relationship between creation, revelation, and redemption. The first of these, at the end of Part II, Volume I ("Creation"), concludes:

> . . . For the last time, God regards what he has created. And this time: lo! – "very good." The root-word of creation emerges from itself. It remains an adjective, remains within the framework of its own essence. But it ceases to

[30] The first edition, published in 1921 by J. Kauffmann, omitted the subheadings. However, the 1930 edition restored them, noting that they were part of Rosenzweig's original manuscript.

designate the simple, individual, uncompared attribute. It becomes a comparative; it compares . . . This "very" heralds a supercreation within creation itself, something more than worldly within the worldly . . .: this "very" is death. The created death of the creature portends the revelation of a life which is above the creaturely level . . . That is why, on the sixth day, it was not said that it was "good" but rather, "behold, very good!" "Very," so our sages teach, "very" – that is death.[31]

The passage draws its energy from three sources. First, Rosenzweig builds upon the juxtaposition within Genesis 1 between the "good" that God pronounces on the work of the first five days of creation and the "very good" (Gen. 1:31) pronounced on the sixth day as God surveys creation as a whole. Second, he draws on a midrash in *Bereshit Rabba*, the fifth-century compilation of earlier materials, which, in reference to Genesis 1:31, states simply: "Very good – that is death."[32] Finally, Rosenzweig concludes that creation points not to "death" but to "life above the creaturely level" by drawing a link between the "very good," or "death" within creation and the affirmation "love is strong as death" in Song of Songs 8:6, which become the first words of Part II, Book II. Taken together, Rosenzweig posits that creation itself contains within it the movement toward revelation.

Just as Rosenzweig links the very words of the creation narrative to the text that will ultimately stand in for revelation as a whole, he similarly draws a link between revelation and redemption with a verse from Song of Songs. The passage is the climax of Part II, Book II, throughout which Rosenzweig writes of God's revelation to the soul using the extended metaphor of lover and beloved:

A sob escapes the blissfully overflowing heart of the beloved and forms into words, words which haltingly point to something unfulfilled, something which cannot be fulfilled in the immediate revelation of love: "O that you were like a brother to me!" Not enough that the beloved lover calls his bride by the name of sister in the flickering twilight of allusion. The name ought to be the truth. It should be heard in the bright light of "the street," not whispered into the beloved ear in the dusk of intimate duo-solitude, but in the eyes of the multitude, officially – "who would grant" that![33]

[31] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 173/155.
[32] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 173/155. See *Bereshit Rabba* 9:5.
[33] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 228/203.

This climax thrice invokes Song 8:1, "O that you were [*mi yiten*, lit. "who would grant"] my brother, that I could kiss you in the street." Rosenzweig understands the passage as describing the soul's thirst for the presence of God in the world. But the soul's longing must remain unrealized: "This longing cannot be fulfilled in love. The sobs of the beloved penetrate beyond love, to a future beyond its present revelation."[34] Precisely this frustration leads the soul to turn toward the neighbor – a turn that, for Rosenzweig, signifies the onset of redemption. He signifies this turn with the citation, once again, of a biblical text as the opening words of the next volume – Part II, volume III begins: "Love thy neighbor." Here the erotic "love" of Song of Songs becomes the neighborly love of Leviticus 19:18. As Rosenzweig writes, "All commandments which derive from that primeval 'love me!' ultimately merge in the all-inclusive 'love thy neighbor!' "[35] (The "Word of God" section in Part II, Book III, centers on Psalm 115, which for Rosenzweig signifies the result of infinite neighborly love that joins all of humanity when the command, "Love thy neighbor," is realized: " 'Not the dead' – indeed not, but we, we will praise God from this time forth and to eternity.' . . . The We are eternal; death plunges into the Nought in the face of this triumphal shout of eternity. Life becomes immortal in redemption's eternal hymn of praise.")[36] Thus specific biblical texts link each theological moment – creation, revelation, and redemption – to the others.

These explicit discussions of the three biblical selections in Part II of *Star* might easily be mistaken for the whole of Rosenzweig's meditations on scripture in *Star*. But these subsections constitute merely the most obvious point of entry for our analysis. An essential component of *Star*'s unique vocal register stems from the quotations, phrases, and bits of text drawn from the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish liturgy.[37] These "covert"

[34] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 228/203.
[35] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 229/205.
[36] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 281/253.
[37] Rosenzweig used Jewish sources more consistently than he did Christian sources. The former are drawn from a broad swath of Jewish literary history, including some midrashic, talmudic, and liturgical sources, and are integrated throughout Rosenzweig's text, whereas New Testament sources are given comparatively short shrift. (Interestingly, Hallo included in his English translation only an "Index of Jewish sources." The second edition of *Star* (1930), which as noted earlier restored the subtitles and indices of the manuscript to the printed edition, also includes the New Testament sources that Rosenzweig cites.)

texts are integrated into Rosenzweig's prose without notes or citations, animating rather than ornamenting the text of *Star*.[38] The "covert" uses of the Bible in *Star* are much more significant, in fact, for the way Rosenzweig creates a resonant text and, in effect, a "rewritten Bible."

A range of techniques aid him in this effort. At times, Rosenzweig calls attention to fragments of biblical and liturgical text in his text by marking them with quotation marks. These fragments have a performative value: Rosenzweig seeks to display the imported text within his own. These relatively obvious instances of allusion operate as would-be "prooftexts" that conspire to lend Rosenzweig's own words the weight of biblical or liturgical authority. Consider the penultimate paragraph of *Star*:

> For the view from the height of the redeemed world beyond [*Überwelt*] shows me nothing other than what the word of revelation already called for in the midst of life; and to walk in the light of the divine countenance is given only to the one who follows in the words of the divine mouth. For "he has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Eternal your God demands of you, to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The imported text, Micah 6:8, is marked by the quotation marks; the fact that Rosenzweig offsets these verses visually suggests that he wishes to make clear their borrowed nature. This prooftext serves to enhance the authority and resonance of the passage as a whole: it brings Rosenzweig's own lyrical words to a close with a biblical verse that seems to confirm its truth. Other examples of this usage of marked texts include the prominent reference to the blessing thanking God for "planting eternal life in our midst"[39] and the verses from Psalm 136, especially

[38] The list of sources familiar to readers of Hallo's translation of *Star* was not part of the first edition; in 1929, Rosenzweig requested that Nahum Glatzer prepare the appendix included in the second edition of *Star* (1930) (which Hallo's translation included as well). (See Eugene Sheppard, " 'I Am a Memory Come Alive': Nahum Glatzer and the Legacy of German-Jewish Thought in America," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 1 (2004): 125–6.) Barbara Galli's more recent translation adheres to the first edition and thus does not include the list of sources; see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Rosenzweig's omission of any such guide to his sources in the first edition suggests that his aim was to integrate these allusions into his prose, giving the latter a biblical register, rather than to identify the "foreign" textual imports.

[39] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 372/335.

"for He is good," interspersed throughout Rosenzweig's description of the redemption of the communal "We."[40]

The marked citations can be thought of as the *overt* use of scriptural citation, and they provide a clear indication to the reader that Rosenzweig wishes his own writing to refer to and build upon the Bible as an explicit "intertext." But more significant in establishing the voice of *Star* as a whole is Rosenzweig's *covert* use of scripture, in which he assimilated biblical allusions into his own prose. I dwell on three examples that show the degree to which Rosenzweig carefully integrated the biblical text into his prose, and in doing so, simultaneously reinterpreted it.

The first such example is nicely showcased in Rosenzweig's presentation of the dialogue between God and human being:

> The human being had remained a spiteful and stubborn self silent at God's "Where art thou?" Now he answers when his name is twice called, called in the most extreme definiteness that could not be ignored, totally undone, totally spread apart, totally ready, totally – soul, he answers "Here am I."[41]

In this passage, Rosenzweig creates a composite text by borrowing from several different highly charged biblical sources and placing them within his own narrative framework. The address "Where art thou" is God's call to Adam in Genesis 3:9. But in the biblical text, God does not call Adam twice by name; indeed, as feminist biblical scholars have argued, "Adam" does not even become a proper name until the sex differentiation of the first, androgynous human being in Genesis 2:21; "Adam" is most often used in Genesis 1–2 with the definite article [*ha'adam*/"the earth-creature"].[42] Moreover, Adam's response to God's call in Genesis 3 is to deny or evade responsibility by hiding. Rosenzweig, by contrast, endows Adam with the noble response of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, the Pentateuchal characters each called twice by name who answer with the formula that expresses presence and the readiness to accept God's will – "Here am I."[43]

[40] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 258–9/231

[41] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 196/176.

[42] Phyllis Trible famously called attention to the distinction between *adam* as a proper name and *adam* (or *ha-adam*) to designate humankind in general as part of her feminist interpretive project. See Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (1973).

[43] See Genesis 22:11; Genesis 46:2; Exodus 3:4.

The fact that both "Where art thou" and "Here am I" are unmarked in the text allows Rosenzweig to construct a highly resonant, intertextual reading of his own in which "Here am I" appears to be the answer of the human soul to a divine call that addresses this soul individually. The new composite poetic text narrates how the human being becomes responsive to God's call. It does so by exploiting the resonance of the biblical text and jettisoning the particularistic element of God's address to the Pentateuchal characters, each of whom plays a role in the making of the "chosen people." Thus Rosenzweig has produced a text in which any and every soul responds to the direct invitation of God. Rosenzweig universalizes revelation by mapping it not onto the ancient stories of the Israelite prophets but onto Adam, the first human being.

A second instance of reinterpretation allows Rosenzweig to make another central theological point about the role of language in mediating or even manifesting the relationship between God and humanity. He introduces his discussion of Genesis, in the "Word of God" section of Part II, Book I of *Star*, with the following words:

> God's ways and people's ways are different, but God's word and the human word are the same. What people take, in their own hearts, to be their own human speech is the word that comes out of the mouth of God. The word of creation, which resounds within and from out of us – from the root word [*Stammwort*], which rings directly up from the muteness of the primordial word [*Urwort*] all the way to the complete, objectified narrative form of the past – all of this is also the word that God has spoken and that we find written in the book of Genesis.[44]

This dense passage is typical of *Star*: it is thick with scriptural allusions that Rosenzweig pieces together and reworks with lyrical language and peculiar rhetoric, building toward a definitive assertion he never justifies.

Rosenzweig's opening words declare that although "the ways of God" and the "ways of the human being" are different, the "word" is common to both. This formulation alludes to Isaiah 55:8: "My ways are not your ways." Now, this text was the basis of a well-known rabbinic exegetical effort to mitigate Isaiah's unbridgeable gap between God

[44] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 167–168/151.

and the human being. The distance between our ways and God's, the Talmudic sages declare, could be lessened precisely through the imitation of God's ways: How is it possible to "walk in God's ways," the Talmudic sage R. Hama asks:

> Just as the Holy One Blessed be He clothes the naked, as it is written, *And God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them* [Gen. 3:21], so you [should] clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He visits the sick, as it is written, *And God appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre* [Gen. 18:1], so you [should] visit the sick. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He comforts the bereaved, as it is written, *After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son* [Gen. 25:11], so you [should] comfort the bereaved.[45]

Human beings, as this text implies, can partially overcome the absolute difference between God and humanity by showing compassion toward others and thus acting "like God."

It is not the simple fact of rereading or misreading the biblical text that is striking here, for Rosenzweig has ample precedent for this practice. Rather, it is the specific nature of his rereading that is noteworthy. Rosenzweig's reading does not merely diverge from the oft-cited rabbinic rereading of the verse, but almost belligerently contradicts it. Rosenzweig's assertion that the "word" is common to both God and human being subverts not only the simple meaning of Isaiah 55:8, which emphasizes the absolute difference between the divine and the human, but also the praxis-oriented (mis)reading of the rabbis. Rosenzweig's fundamental disinterest in praxis led him to ignore rabbinic concepts of *imitatio Dei*; he seeks to *encounter*, not "imitate," God. This encounter was to occur through the language of the Bible ("the word") *rather than* through ministrations to one's neighbor.

In Rosenzweig's version of the midrash, it is the (biblical) word, rather than ethical action, that serves as the meeting ground for God and humanity. But Rosenzweig refuses to state just how language overcomes the distance, as Part I established, that separates the divine and the human: Is "the word" a bridge between the two realms, or is it their common coin? Is language ultimately a human endeavor or does it

[45] BT Sotah 14a.

derive from God? Rosenzweig's careful choice of phrasing adds a further layer of ambiguity. In stating that "the word" (instead of "language" or "speech") is the same for God and for the human being, he is able to exploit several layers of meaning: "the word" has a distinctively biblical cast that "speech or "language" does not: "the word" implies, while never quite admitting, "the word of God."

The most evasive and vague claim in this passage is Rosenzweig's declaration that the text of the Bible fulfills the possibilities of God's "word." In *Star*, the "word of creation" originates in God. It is also, as Rosenzweig posits, that which we perceive as our own innermost speech: "It is easy to trust language, for it is in us and around us ... The word of creation ... resounds within and from out of us.[46] Language is, in this portrayal, a primordial divine element of creation. Yet Rosenzweig also contends that "the word of creation" is "also the word that God has spoken and that we find written in the book of Genesis." This statement nuances the idea of the primordial language of creation by connecting it to the specific book of Genesis, which tells of the creation of the world through language. The opening verses of the Bible, then, are made to correspond to the encounter in which God calls out to the human being and transforms the "pagan" world – the world perceived as merely perduring – into a world that has been created. But it is this very elision of the distinction between the *narrative of creation* in Genesis and *creation itself* that generates the inviting confusion of this section of *Star*. It is a pattern that Rosenzweig repeats throughout Part II: the biblical text is neither the object of critical scholarship nor the sustained object of commentary; it is a prophecy that contains its own subject within it.

A final example of Rosenzweig's method of reinterpretation underscores how the subtle integration of biblical language into Rosenzweig's prose conveys a yet subtler philosophical point. The opening words of Part II, Book I, declare:

> God spoke. That came second. It is not the beginning. It is already the audible fulfillment of the silent beginning. It is already the first miracle [*das erste Wunder*]. The beginning is: God created.[47]

[46] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 167/151.
[47] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 124/112.

This passage is simply unintelligible without the hidden opening words of Genesis as the canvas on which Rosenzweig paints his own words. On the basis of Genesis 1:1–3, he argues that God's creative activity preceded God's verbal activity. The essential fact, for Rosenzweig, is that "in the beginning God created" [*bereshit bara' elohim*] precedes "God said" [*vayomer elohim*]. Rosenzweig's reading of the biblical text supports his philosophical contention that creation is a "silent" act made meaningful by language. This interpretation contradicts the less celebrated but more accurate interpretation that the first three Hebrew words of Genesis should be understood as a subordinate clause ("At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was wild and waste, . . ."). [48] Rosenzweig seems to have had in mind the standard Luther translation ("Am Anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde") and thus links his argument – that God's speech activates God's creation – to the words of the Genesis text itself. [49]

With these words, Rosenzweig describes the transformation of the "pagan world" into the "created world." Rosenzweig, a modern child of Kant (and, more proximately, Hermann Cohen), accepts that this transformation does not occur in the external world but rather in the mind of the individual potentially touched by what Rosenzweig will call "revelation." Rosenzweig accepts the limits of reason and works within them; he does not challenge the fact that on an ontological level, the pagan world is identical with the created world. He contends instead that it is on the *epistemological* level that a transformation takes place. In making the opening declaration that God's speech constitutes the "first miracle," Rosenzweig claims, in good post-Kantian form, that miracles are to be understood not as the suspension of the laws of nature but as

[48] This translation by Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 11–13. See Rashi *ad loc.* Genesis 1:1.

[49] Rosenzweig's own 1925 translation with Buber rendered Genesis 1:1 as "Im Anfang schuf Gott den Himmel und die Erde" (a very minor diversion from Luther compared with the many other passages where Buber and Rosenzweig differed radically from his translation). Unfortunately, the lack of a comprehensive intellectual biography leaves scholars unclear about just how deeply acquainted Rosenzweig was with classical Hebrew texts. We know that during 1914, he began to study at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and studied Hebrew as well as biblical and post-biblical Jewish literature. But the degree to which Rosenzweig attained a sophisticated and autonomous grasp of biblical and rabbinic literature has not yet been documented.

the fulfillment of a prophecy.[50] This philosophical point is central to understanding the relationship between language and act: language, though ontologically secondary, is that which allows the "prophecy" of creation to be understood as such. "God created" is a potential miracle, not an actual miracle. The actual miracle is God's speech, which transforms and thus fulfills what is already given. It is this quality that gives divine speech a primacy that will become central to the revelatory experience, while allowing Rosenzweig to stay within the bounds of "reason alone": he endows the phenomenon of language, rather than the work of creation, with the burden of transformation from pagan to created. These examples indicate the complexity and the artistry in the pervasive element of "covert" biblical citation within the prose of *Star*.

Rosenzweig's creation of a scriptural text depended on the techniques of biblical citation, allusion, and assimilation I have described. But it also relied on his careful choice of a few particular biblical texts and the exclusion of innumerable others. For *Star*, as a "rewritten Bible," does not engage the Bible as a whole, but revolves around a few highly charged passages, which implicitly create a distinctive "canon within the canon."[51] The creation of this canon was guided by two interrelated considerations that required the jettisoning of much of the Bible alongside the reinterpretation of the texts discussed earlier.

The first of these considerations was Rosenzweig's refusal to include any passage with obvious implications for praxis. Rosenzweig ignored

[50] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 104/94. In his introduction to Part II, "On the Possibility of Experiencing Miracles," Rosenzweig argues that the miracle, always the "most beloved child of belief," was damaged more by the historical than by the scientific enlightenment. For Rosenzweig, the concept of the miracle rests on the idea of the fulfillment of a prophecy rather than a superimposition on the laws of nature. His project is definitively post-Kantian in that he wishes to save religion, at least in some attenuated form, in a time in which the limits of reason have been firmly established. His religiosity is both radically theistic and circumscribed by the limits of reason. For more on this point, see Samuel Moyn, "Is Revelation in the World?," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 3 (2006): 397.

[51] Rosenzweig later rejected this strategy. As I show in Chapter 3, Rosenzweig, in his later writing, associated this concept of a "canon within the canon" with Luther, who in turn stood for all of Christianity; by 1926, Rosenzweig claimed to reject any perceived "essentializing" of the biblical "message" in favor of a theory of the omnisignificance of the words of the Bible. This conviction is most apparent in his 1926 essay "Scripture and Luther" (Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber [Berlin: Schocken, 1936).]

almost all Levitical and Deuteronomic legal texts in *Star* except for the command to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). His eventual flirtation with Jewish religious practice notwithstanding, the revelation of *Star* is definitively without – even deliberately antithetical to – practical significance.[52] The revelatory word, for Rosenzweig, does not legislate, and its single command demands only an internal response on the part of the "soul." (As I will show later, even the Ten Commandments are stripped of all meaning but the announcement of God's presence.) The turn to the neighbor, to the one who "happens to be nearest to me,"[53] has often been interpreted as being the locus of an ethical imperative within *Star*. But Rosenzweig's translation of "Love thy neighbor" is best understood not as the valorization of care for the human other or a justification of the ultimate good of this care, but rather as the demand for the neighbors to join together into a "We."

In his second consideration, Rosenzweig furthermore ignores or rereads any passage that smacks of particularism. He makes a clear effort to deflect any mention of the biblical tales that highlight Israel's election: the "Here am I" of the Israelite patriarchs and prophets becomes the "Here am I" of the soul encountering God. But this is not the only instance. The primordial command "I am the Lord" has been separated from the rest of the sentence ("who brought you out of the land of Egypt"). Rosenzweig consistently omits any references to the particular story of the Israelites, around whom the narrative revolves from Genesis 12 on, their statutes, or the identity of the people who gather to receive God's word. Leaving out any explicit contact with the much-contested story (and thus identity) of the chosen people is integral to Rosenzweig's endeavor of universalizing the human condition. The biblical word that we encounter in the pages of *Star* has been mobilized to serve a "universalized" revelation with neither practical consequences for the individual receiving the revelation nor with any significant corporate body.

Rosenzweig universalizes scripture in *Star*, furthermore, by avoiding marking the biblical texts as either Jewish or Christian. The carefully

[52] Certainly in the era of the composition of *Star*, Rosenzweig remained far from any commitment to Jewish praxis. I discuss the evolution of his stance toward praxis in Chapter 2.

[53] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 243/218.

selected passages in which scriptural language operates most forcefully provide the "vocabulary" and grammatical "structure" of the cosmos and revelatory experience. The first chapter of Genesis, the Song of Songs, and the psalmic refrain "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" are bound together, in Rosenzweig's reading, by a generalized quality that is meant to contrast to the various species of pagan texts discussed in Part I of *Star*. For art, sculpture, and pagan literature are presented as a pre-aesthetic "proto-language" in juxtaposition to which properly revelatory speech can be seen.[54] The texts from the Bible speak to the creation, crisis, and redemption of the human being, rather than to the specific soteriology each tradition prescribes for the amelioration of the human situation. Moreover, only *after* God's revelation to the universal human soul do Judaism and Christianity appear in *Star* (in Part III). This suggests that both Judaism and Christianity are legitimate (if not equal or equivalent) heirs to divine revelation; the key moments of creation, revelation, and redemption that these passages represent are common to both faith communities. The two traditions ritualize and implement the revelation presented in Part II, emerging only after the core phenomena of God's work in the world have come into being.[55]

Rosenzweig's effort rests uneasily upon the shaky ground of biblical "authority." In an age in which that authority had been severely challenged, Rosenzweig simultaneously exploits the resonance of the Bible in the service of his own text and endeavors to renew the Bible's mystique, resonance, and symbolic stature. The varied strategies for incorporating biblical text and allusion into *Star* show that Rosenzweig wished to elevate his own project by bringing phrases and verses from the Bible into his work, making the text of the Bible indispensable to *Star*, and demonstrating his conviction that God shares our language. Yet precisely because the Bible had lost the power of unmediated truth,

[54] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 213/191.

[55] Leora Batnitzky has argued that the order of presentation is the reverse order of ontology: Volume III "produces" or "makes possible" Volume II, which in turn casts light on Volume I. The conclusion is that Rosenzweig intended to indicate that communal ritual action makes revelation possible; see Chapter 3 in Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*. However, in my view, the climactic vision of the "face" at the end of *Star* and the analogy of love and marriage at the end of II:2 (228/204), among other textual clues, suggest that each volume is placed in its rightful – that is to say, linear – order.

at least in Rosenzweig's intellectual circles, he could harness the force of the biblical word only by inflating it to the mythic proportions it acquires in *Star*.

Not only the "Word of God" sections but the fabric of his own prose subtly testify to Rosenzweig's operating conceit that only in the particular privileged reservoir of language – the handpicked and reinterpreted Bible – does human existence come to full expression. But the inherent instability, even paradox, of this project gives *Star*'s proclamatory confidence a façade-like quality. The hope that biblical language would arrest and reorient philosophy, forcing it to reckon with the "fact" of revelation and thus metamorphose into a new way of thinking, contends with an acceptance of the limitations on what revelation might be in the late modern period.

REVELATION AS SONG OF SONGS

Part II of *Star* is centrally occupied with revelation, and with portraying this revelation in the language of the Bible. Thus it stands to reason that Rosenzweig would accord the primary biblical account of the revelation, in Exodus 20, a place of pride in this part of *Star*. But for Rosenzweig, the idea of a historical revelation to the Israelites at Mount Sinai was problematic for multiple reasons, the credibility of the testimony of the Bible being merely the most obvious. The entire notion of a historical revelation had been anathema to Rosenzweig since his earliest engagement with theology through the Patmos Circle. In his early writings, Rosenzweig conceived of revelation as a fixed point anchoring all the dimensions of the cosmos – that is, precisely as ahistorical even in time and space.[56] And while Rosenzweig allocated the Jewish people a certain role as a corporate body, this group does not originate with Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, or the revelation at Mt. Sinai. Rather it has existed since time immemorial, and will continue into the future for all eternity.[57] Thus Rosenzweig's revelation had to replace the revelation at Sinai with a

[56] This idea finds expression in Franz Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, eds. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). On the concept of revelation as outside of the realm of history, see David Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 100.

[57] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 331/298.

revelation that was ahistorical and individual. This was the only sort of revelation that would suit the intellectual constraints of himself, his interlocutors, and his audience. The quest to fulfill this concept biblically took Rosenzweig not to Exodus but to the Songs of Songs.

Rosenzweig's "Revelation" section develops an account of revelation as a dialogue between God and soul. The dialogue centers on God's demand to the soul to respond to him, the soul's initial resistance, her repentance for this resistance, and, finally, her acceptance of God's demand and receiving of God's revelation. The initial demand, uttered by God as "Love me!" is for Rosenzweig a declaration of God's selfhood to the human being, which in turn demands the response that Rosenzweig will call "love." From here, Rosenzweig develops the extended metaphor of the erotic relationship between God and the soul that guides the entirety of *Star*, Part II, Book II. In this sustained meditation on the encounter between God and the human being (or "soul"), Song of Songs serves as both intertext and guide. I trace the way Rosenzweig uses the Song of Songs as his intertext for and representation of revelation to demonstrate the ways he manipulates the biblical text to serve his own ends of universalizing the text and detaching it from all practical imperatives associated with revelation.

Rosenzweig casts the central drama of the volume as a dialogue between God and the soul. It is not just any dialogue that occurs here, however, but a highly orchestrated script. In fact, Rosenzweig's lyrical, dramatic style of prose can easily obscure the crucial feature of the specific dialogue in this passage, which is that the words in the dialogue are words and phrases taken almost entirely from the Bible (though not necessarily from the Song of Songs).[58] If reduced to its spoken content, the dialogue between the soul and God [see following table] would read as follows (words in **boldface** are spoken by God; words in *italics* are spoken by the soul).

[58] While Mosès, Gibbs, and others have noted this point in passing, the idea of dialogue itself has tended to obscure recognition of the importance of the biblical texts in the dialogue. This has resulted in the misleading idea that dialogue *per se*, even interpersonal dialogue, is the primary locus of the revelatory encounter for Rosenzweig. I agree fully with Samuel Moyn's argument that this interpretation yields the opposite meaning from the one Rosenzweig intended (see Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, Chapter 4).

Spoken Words in the "Dialogue"	*Likely Biblical Reference*	*Meaning for Rosenzweig*
Love me!	Deuteronomy 6:5; Exodus 20:2	God's 'I' (Ex. 20:2) is an imperative to the soul; God demands love (Deut. 5:6)
I have sinned [Glossed as *I am thine*]	II Samuel 12:13; Psalms 51:6	The soul, in realizing that it is beloved by God, feels shame for its resistance; declaration "I have sinned" acknowledges God
I have called thee by name; thou art mine	Isaiah 43:1	God establishes connection between present and past, between revelation and creation
My God, my God	Psalms 22:2	The soul reaches out and enters into relation with God; this is the moment when "the soul begins to pray"
Who would grant . . . (Oh that you would . . .)	Song of Songs 8:1	A cry expressing longing for God's presence

The verses of the dialogue, all from the Bible, operate as irreducible, non-expendable building blocks in Rosenzweig's own text. The skeletal "dialogue" between the soul and God consists of five scant phrases, but they form the scaffolding upon which Rosenzweig develops an intricate and weighty edifice that portrays revelation as a universal occurrence rather than as the unique expression of the individual soul's particularity.[59]

In two crucial passages, Rosenzweig introduces the central tenet of his idea of revelation – namely, that it is God's demand, "Love me!" The first passage emphasizes the exceptionality of God's demand:

[59] The contrast here with Buber is most striking. Buber envisions a model of dialogue in which the "I" and "Thou" of the speaker are left fruitfully open; the "content" of the dialogue is completely unspecified and spontaneous. By contrast, Rosenzweig's dialogue is rigidly scripted. Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1923; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).

'Thou shalt love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.' 'Thou shalt love' – what a paradox lies herein! Can love, then, be commanded? ... Indeed, love cannot be commanded; no third party can order and compel it. No third party can, but the One can. The command of love can only come from the mouth of the beloved. Only the lover can and does – truly does – say, 'Love me.'[60]

The paragraph derives its force from the effort to overthrow the possible implication that love can indeed be commanded. Rosenzweig presents the command "Love me" as the inner meaning of Deuteronomy 6:5, the verse that occupies a central place in Jewish liturgy: "Thou shalt love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." But the difference between Deuteronomy's "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" and Rosenzweig's "Love me!" is significant indeed: in the biblical text, an intermediary, Moses, commands the listeners to love God as their duty; in Rosenzweig's restatement, God speaks this imperative directly to the individual. Rosenzweig's gloss on Deuteronomy 6:5 bespeaks a pointed effort to relieve revelation of all heteronomous connotations. His "Love me!" like Moses Mendelssohn's appeal to "historical truths" and Hermann Cohen's "revelation of reason," attempts to evade and displace the multiple legislative imperatives of the Sinaitic revelation with a demand that is at once forceful and empty.

The second passage rewrites the revelation at Sinai as it limits the Ten Commandments and, by extension, all of revelation, to the first words spoken by God to the people:

[God's] 'I' accompanies revelation through all of the particular commandments. This 'I the Eternal' creates its own tool and its own style in the prophets for revelation. ... The prophet can hardly utter his 'Thus sayeth the Eternal one' or the yet briefer, more hurried 'Utterance of the Eternal,' which forgoes even the complete sentence – when God has already taken possession of his lips ... God's 'I' remains the root word, which pervades revelation like an organ note; it resists any translation into the He; it is I and must remain I. Only the I, not the He, can speak the imperative of love; it must continually state [*lauten*] only: love me.[61]

[60] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 196–7/176.
[61] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 198/178.

Rosenzweig recasts *anochi adonai* ("I the Lord," Exodus 20:2),[62] the announcement of God's identity with which the Ten Commandments begin, as itself the demand "Love me!"

The purpose of this "translation" of *anochi adonai* seeks to create a contentless revelation. "Revelation commences with the 'I the Eternal,' " Rosenzweig declares.[63] But revelation not only *commences* with these first two words of the Ten Commandments; it *concludes* with them as well. Rosenzweig focuses on this single phrase 'I the Eternal' without reference to any other element of the giving of the Law; his understanding of God's command is stripped of all practical consequences. The transformation of God's 'I the Eternal' – and metonymically, all of the Sinaitic revelation – into 'Love me' provides an opening for him to empty revelation of content.

Rosenzweig's portrayal of revelation, framed by Pentateuchal parameters but utterly and idiosyncratically Rosenzweigian, is the product of a distinctly modern imagination. Rosenzweig has harnessed the biblical text to utterly reinvent the content of revelation: no longer is the primary meaning of revelation the experience of a people gathered together awaiting the commanding voice of God that imparts the teachings and burden of the written and oral law. Rosenzweig literally invents, or rewrites, "the word of God" by melding two distinct verses: Deuteronomy 6:5, in which Moses commands the people to love God, who is spoken of in the third person, and Exodus 20:2, in which God speaks directly to the people in the first person, but without any mention of the word "love." Rosenzweig presents the resulting pseudo-verse, a command that appears nowhere in the biblical text itself, as

[62] The translation of *anochi adonai* later became a matter of great interest to Rosenzweig. Reading this text alongside God's declaration of God's name in Exodus 3:14 (*ehyeh asher ehyeh*), Rosenzweig concluded in an essay written a decade after *Star* that translating God's appellation as "The Eternal" constitutes the gravest of philosophical and theological errors. He indeed criticized Mendelssohn for having precisely this error in his essay "Der Ewige" (1929). Rosenzweig came to argue that referring to God as "The Eternal" obscures an important theological matter: that God meets individuals in time. See Franz Rosenzweig, "'Der Ewige'" in *Franz Rosenzweig: Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984); Franz Rosenzweig, "The Eternal," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For a discussion of this point, see Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, Chapter 5.

[63] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 198/178.

the most privileged of all speech in *Star*: "Love me!" the only [*einzige*] commandment issued by God to the human soul.[64]

Rosenzweig's concept of revelation in *Star* interests us not only because of Rosenzweig's idiosyncratic reading of biblical texts to illustrate his concept of revelation. It also invites us to consider Rosenzweig's contention that his primary intertext, the Song of Songs, *contains* revelation. Rosenzweig contends that until the nineteenth-century Romantics reinterpreted it, the Song was intuitively understood correctly. Readers knew, he claims, that its "deeper meaning lies, directly and not allegorically, precisely here in the purely sensual sense."[65] That is, they understood that the "purely sensual sense" [*rein sinnlichen Sinn*] of this work contained within it a logically prior divine meaning. But with Herder and Goethe, the text came to be subjected to "literal" readings. This approach sought coherence and correspondence of characters, thus setting the stage for modern critical scholarship and the breakdown of the theological heart of the Song. Treating the Song as a drama, in the manner of the German Romantics, dissolved the structural unity of the Song and fragmented the critical dyadic relation at its heart.[66] Now, Rosenzweig's claim that the interpretation of the Song was "understood correctly" until the turn of the nineteenth century is tenuous, as is his eagerness to blame Herder for the demise of the supposedly correct reading of the Song that had heretofore reigned supreme. But, as Samuel Moyn has pointed out, Rosenzweig's caricature reveals that he could not accept Herder's diffuse model of divinity because it lacked the "specifically interpersonal" quality so critical to Rosenzweig's concept of revelation.[67]

Rosenzweig proposes a competing reading that he presents as that of theological restoration. He aims to revive a lost hermeneutic of the Song, one in which

[64] In Deuteronomy 6:5, Moses speaks the words about a third-person referent, God, whereas Rosenzweig treats them as God's own first person imperative. In Exodus 20:2, the word "love" does not appear in the first (or in any) commandment.

[65] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 222/199.

[66] Sam Moyn, "Divine and Human Love: Franz Rosenzweig's History of the Song of Songs," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005): 5–6.

[67] See ibid. Moyn argues that Herder's "different theology" (rather than wholesale rejection of theology) allows him to "literalize" the Song without jettisoning its theological significance.

[o]ne recognized the Song of Songs as a love-song and precisely by the same token, simultaneously, as a "mystical" poem. One knew that the I and Thou of human speech is, in and of itself, also the I and Thou between God and human being. One knew that the difference between immanence and transcendence expires in language [*Sprache*]. Not in spite of, but because the Song of Song is an "authentic," "worldly" love-song, just because of this is it an authentic "spiritual" song of the love of God for the human being.

The world-view that Rosenzweig wants in order to "recover" the distinction between immanence and transcendence disappears in language. Linguistic immanence – the plain sense of the Song of Songs, here correlated with the "worldly," the corporeal, the human – contains within it and is identical to the transcendent, the divine. The capacity of this particular text's language to overcome the divide between the secular and the divine thus testifies to it as a point of connection between God and humanity. This unique ability to actually contain or manifest revelation is what Rosenzweig calls allegory [*Gleichnis*]. Indeed, Rosenzweig claims that the Song of Songs is the one true, paradigmatic example of *Gleichnis*, or speech true to revelation:

The allegory of love permeates all of revelation as allegory. It is the ever-recurring allegory of the prophets. But it must in fact be more than allegory. And it can only be such when it appears without a "that means," without any reference to that which it is supposed to allegorize. It therefore does not suffice for God's relation to the human being to be portrayed by the allegory of lover to beloved; *the word of God must contain directly the relation of lover to beloved – that is, the signifier* [Bedeutende] *without pointing at all to the signified* [Bedeutete]. And so we find it in the Song of Songs.[68]

The allegories of lover/beloved (or, more commonly, husband/wife) that characterize both the lyrical words of Isaiah and the harsh, even abusive language of Hosea are for Rosenzweig a testament to the importance of this simile for divine/human experience. However, the Song of Songs is a paradigmatic, privileged text for Rosenzweig because the metaphor never calls attention to its metaphorical status; it is not simile (*Vergleich*), but a bold assertion that God *is* the lover, and the soul *is* the beloved.

[68] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 221–2/199; italics mine.

Now, the Song of Songs has enjoyed a long *interpretive history* as an allegory of God and the religious community.[69] Indeed, the fact that the Song of Songs has any place in the Jewish and Christian canons depended on the complete transformation of its bold eroticism into sanctioned allegory.[70] But Rosenzweig here does not refer to that history of interpretation, but to the text itself. In effect, he treats the allegorical interpretive history of the Song of Songs as contained within the text's 'plain sense.' Indeed, only by claiming the presence of this double register within the Song itself can he claim that this text constitutes a unique instance of signifier and signified in one.

Interestingly, Rosenzweig's reading of the Song of Songs underscores two seemingly contradictory elements within it: on the one hand, its fusion of the divine and human in language, and on the other, its perpetual deferral of the unification of divine and human. For the Song of Songs, as Rosenzweig's reading recognized, is an erotic text with neither sexual consummation nor a traceable plot. Indeed, eros depends upon distance; absence, not presence, sustains the lovers in their desire

[69] Rabbinic interpretations of the Song understand it as an allegory of the love between God and the people Israel; patristic interpretations hold the Song to be an allegory of God and the Church. Arthur Green argues that tropological interpretations of the Song of Songs (that is, interpretations that read the book as an allegory of the relation between God (or Christ) and the individual soul) have a marginal place in the history of Jewish exegesis but a more central role in patristic and medieval Christian interpretation. In this, Green lends support to Rosenzweig's more polemical version of this claim. See Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002).

The literature on the history of Song of Songs interpretation is vast. See especially Ann Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory* (1995); Marcia Bunge, "Human Language of the Divine: Herder on Ways of Speaking About God," in *Herder Today*, ed. Kurt Müller-Vollmer (Berlin: 1990); Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Martin Pope, ed., *The Anchor Bible: The Song of Songs*, vol. 7C (New York: 1977); Green, "Shekhinah."

[70] Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26; Green, "Shekhinah." Note the Talmudic interdiction on treating Song of Songs as an erotic poem: "One who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and treats it as a ditty, and one who recites a verse at the banqueting table not in its season, brings evil upon the world" (BT Sanhedrin 101a).

for one another.[71] The perpetual deferral of any sort of climax, erotic or narrative, in the Song of Songs[72] – its constant "not yet" – has a clear theological parallel that makes it an ideal text for Rosenzweig: the distance between God-as-lover and soul-as-beloved corresponds to the crucial theological distance interposed between God and humanity.[73] The longing of the beloved soul for God had to remain unfulfilled; for it to be otherwise would be tantamount to claiming that the Kingdom of God – what is, in Hegelian terms, the ultimate unification of the eternal and the temporal – had arrived.

But language, as opposed to history or any *Geist* governing it, promised Rosenzweig a rich meeting place for divine and human. This search for the locus of a language that contained its own signified was not unique to Rosenzweig; it was shared by a host of Jewish intellectuals who grew to maturity during the turbulent Weimar years. Gershom Scholem's dispassionate analysis of kabbalistic symbols thinly veils a theological subtext that directly parallels Rosenzweig's discussion of allegory. Scholem wrote that the "symbol" is

a form of expression which radically transcends the sphere of allegory. . . . The thing which becomes a symbol retains its original form and its original content. It does not become, so to speak, an empty shell into

[71] As Anne Carson writes in *Eros the Bittersweet*, the gap necessary to the creation and maintenance of eros relies upon the boundaries separating lovers. The poems about erotic desire she examines "are all aimed at defining one certain edge or difference: an edge between two images that cannot merge into a single focus because they do not derive from the same level of reality – one is actual, one is possible. To know both, keeping the difference visible, is the subterfuge called eros." Boundaries between the 'is' and the 'desired,' like those between lovers, are thus intrinsically connected to the preservation of the yearning to overcome the distance [Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (University of Urbana-Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 69].

[72] Ilana Pardes notes that unlike most divine love poems from the cultures of Mesopotamia, the Song of Songs "maintains a fascinating tension between chastity and sexual freedom. . . . Sexual union in the Song takes place only on a figurative level, and even then it is often anticipated in a jussive verbal tense instead of being narrated in perfect tense. . . . Desire reigns in the Song, not fulfillment; and in this sense the Song adheres to the biblical worldview. In the Hebrew Bible there is an urgent desire for fulfillment, but by and large . . . this fulfillment is denied" [Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 125–6].

[73] Barth, following Kierkegaard, called this distance an "infinite qualitative difference." See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10; Chapter 4 in Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

which another content is poured; it in itself, through its own existence, it makes another reality transparent which cannot appear in any other form.[74]

Scholem's "symbol," as Susan Handelman has argued, represented the form "wherein the absolute could be experienced and realized in some unmediated way." Scholem regarded the symbol as if it were endowed with the mysterious, salvific capacity "to overcome the gap between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, sensibility and reason. . . . In effect," Handelman writes, "the symbol itself has here become an agent of redemption."[75] As with Rosenzweig's allegory, Scholem saw in the "symbol" the ability to overcome the alienation that comes from the gap between language and its referent.[76] Rosenzweig's emphasis in *Star* on *Gleichnis* and its relationship to the Song of Songs' uniquely revelatory character exhibits this same flirtation with redemptive ideas of language. In Rosenzweig's usage, *Gleichnis* is a type of expression of which the paradigmatic, and indeed only, true example can be found in the Song of Songs.

[74] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941; New York: Schocken, 1964), 27.

[75] Susan Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 105. See also the related discussion of myth in Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chapter 5.

[76] In fact, Handelman points out that Scholem posited the virtues of the symbol in *contrast* to "allegory," which "arises from the *gap* between form and meaning . . ., [so that] what is allegorized loses its own meaning and becomes a vehicle of another meaning." Rosenzweig and Handelman use the terms "allegory" and "symbol" in different ways, but for each of them, a theological meaning was grafted onto the purely literary referent. See Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption*, 107–09. For Scholem's understanding of symbol, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 26; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Note that this opposition of "symbol" to "allegory" reflects a pervasive tendency in Romantic thinking. As one reviewer of this trend states, "As if to make the distinction between old and new, artificial and mystical, Hellenistic and Christian forms of allegory even more emphatic, the Romantic style of allegorical rhetoric would henceforth go by the name of symbolism, a symbolism that derived its integrity by means of its opposition to old-style allegory" – an opposition, however, that did not shed the theological underpinnings of its explicitly Christian origins [Deborah Madsen, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 3].

Examining the specific role of biblical language, and the select parts that Rosenzweig chooses to use, demonstrates the extent to which his theological convictions about language are saturated with scriptural notions in general and biblical sources and references in particular. All of these, in fact, compose the boundaries of what can be considered privileged language. Revelation is to be found in the text whose meaning is uniquely and simultaneously, in Rosenzweig's words, ''sensual'' and ''supersensual.'' This explains why no generalized concept of ''speech'' could suffice for Rosenzweig: only this particular, scriptural text could allow for a meeting of the divine and the human in language.

The Song of Songs was, for Rosenzweig, where the word of God and the word of humanity meet each other. Rosenzweig aims to close the hermeneutic gap between the ''literal'' and the ''allegorical'' reading of the Song because language – as opposed to praxis, identity, or knowledge – allows the human and the divine to intermingle. Revelation, recast as the single instance of true allegory in the Song of Songs, simultaneously gestures toward both transcendence and immanence, and the contradictions generated toward these movements inform the language *of Star* as well as its meditations *on* language.

Scripture in *Star* aimed to anchor and reorient philosophical thinking in an era that Rosenzweig, like many of his similarly theologically minded contemporaries, perceived as a time in desperate need of new thinking. Revelation was to be metonymically represented by carefully selected and reinterpreted biblical passages, passages that served not to illustrate revelation so much as to overwhelm the reader with their power. The specific scriptural passages that occupy a pivotal role in *Star*, moreover, are meant to serve not merely as poetic versions or ornaments for a philosophical system accessible by other means, but as the joints and hinges of a new kind of thinking. Scriptural language and text served to make the case for this thinking by showing the indispensability of revelation, and the text that represented it, to all cognition and experience. Rosenzweig's simultaneous reaffirmation of and rebuke to philosophy turned on scripture precisely because it embodied revelation: revelation not as an abstract concept or the reductionistic ''essence'' of a religious tradition but as the passionate and palpable force of the word of God that reorients all thought.

Star's rhetorical force, which derives so much of its power from Rosenzweig's hermeneutical hubris, achieves its power in part thanks to the doubly strategic method with which he avoids addressing a number of thorny problematics – in particular, the waning authority of the scriptural text and the very notion of revelation itself. *Star*'s deliberate obfuscation of the boundary between the biblical text and its own interpretation of it was part of a larger attempt to make revelation a powerful and palpable force for skeptical readers. Rosenzweig's refusal to address the status of the biblical text did not mean that the problem of scriptural authority had thereby been relegated to irrelevance. The fact that Rosenzweig built his complex edifice on such unstable foundations suggests that he aimed to use scripture even more for its *performative* value than for its substantive contribution to philosophy. Underneath his intricate but ultimately precarious structure, the beams of post-Kantian religious thought are clearly visible.

In Rosenzweig's first engagement with scripture we see the pitfalls and power of this refusal to engage the modern historical-critical problem with scripture. Rosenzweig was able to construct an imposing edifice that promised the power of the unmediated word. Yet the bombast and grandeur of *Star*'s structure and language were ultimately unsatisfying to Rosenzweig himself. In the works written after *Star*, he increasingly reckoned with the multiple factors that mediate scripture and revelation. The shortcomings of his early approach – the impossibility of engaging in debate about the very issue of what revelation meant and how, if at all, it was to be perceived in scripture – led Rosenzweig ultimately to reject the rhetorical posture of *Star*, even as he continued to embrace scripture as a key concept for Jewish revival in his later writings. For in spite of the radical means by which Rosenzweig enjoined scripture into a new and powerful role in *Star*'s vision of the relationship between God, humanity, and world, and creation, revelation, and redemption, it was not sustainable in the broader context of the activities with which he became engaged in the 1920s: the Lehrhaus and the translation projects.

In 1918–19, Rosenzweig had not yet formulated the questions that were to animate his later writings on the Bible and revelation. But we see in *Star* his initial attempt to forge a new language for theology out of sources at once ancient and alive. How Rosenzweig was to negotiate the

subtleties of such an attempt, which he detours in the lyrical experiment at the heart of *Star*, would only later come to crystallization. But it is clear that this persistent concern, if not readily apparent from the surface of *Star*, was nonetheless "latent within," as Rosenzweig described it at the end of his life to his friend Richard Koch. The book that Rosenzweig hoped to write at the age of seventy – a work "on everything and various other items" yet "in the form of a Bible commentary" – was never written. But within the perplexing book that did emerge, we can nonetheless detect hints of the youthful Rosenzweig's ultimate ambitions. The "scriptural thinking" that animates *Star* anchors the trajectory that characterized the remainder of Rosenzweig's intellectual life.

2

Yehudah Halevi: The Creation of a Scriptural World

In 1923, Franz Rosenzweig wrote to his friend Joseph Prager that he had undertaken a new project:

I have translated a little volume of Yehudah Halevi with an afterword and notes. In the commentary on it I note the places where I was not able to translate literally. Rhyme and meter have been reproduced precisely. The whole thing owes its genesis to Emil Cohn . . ., [whose book] got me so annoyed that these verses came out.[1]

Emil Cohn, a Berlin-born rabbi, dramaturge, prolific writer of popular works on Jewish history and education, and outspoken Zionist, had recently published a German translation of selections from the *dīwān* of the twelfth-century Hebrew poet and philosopher Yehudah Halevi.[2] Rosenzweig's intemperate letter refers to the volume that he would publish a few years later called *Sixty Hymns and Poems of Yehudah Halevi*.[3] Rosenzweig's translation of and commentary on the poems of Yehudah Halevi began as a simple corrective to Cohn, but it grew into something

An abridged version of this chapter was published as "Building a Zion in German(y): Franz Rosenzweig on Yehudah Halevi," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* n.s. 13:2 (Winter 2007): 127–154.

[1] Letter 843 (January 12, 1923) to Joseph Prager in Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 2: 878.

[2] Emil Bernhard Cohn, *Ein Diwan [von] Jehuda Halevi, Übertragen und mit einem Lebensbild Versehen von Emil Bernhard [Cohn]* (Berlin: E. Reiss, 1920).

[3] Franz Rosenzweig, *Sechzig Hymnen und Gedichte des Jehuda Halevis* (Konstanz: Oskar Wöhrle, 1924). A second edition was published three years later as Franz Rosenzweig, *Zweiundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte des Jehuda Halevis* (Berlin: Lambert Schneider, 1927).

much grander. Rosenzweig's volume constituted nothing less than a proposal for the creation of a distinctively scriptural and liturgical Jewish identity in German language and culture.

Among Rosenzweig's works, *Hymns and Poems* has suffered from scholarly neglect.[4] Encountering it yields a significant, and notably different, picture of Rosenzweig from the one commonly associated with *The Star of Redemption*. *Hymns and Poems* marks the first flowering of Rosenzweig's post-philosophical thought, which culminated in his translation, beginning in 1925, of the Hebrew Bible into German with Martin Buber.[5] *Hymns and Poems* stands, moreover, as a testament to the dynamics of German-Jewish cultural and intellectual politics during the Weimar period, when Jewish intellectuals grappled in new ways with the problem of distinctiveness and belonging in German culture. Rosenzweig's work on Halevi was shaped by these larger debates, and the book that resulted from his initial encounter with Cohn's *Ein Diwan [von] Jehuda Halevi* offers a glimpse of the profound questions that drew Rosenzweig into his new project.

I shall argue in this chapter that *Hymns and Poems* should be understood not only as a feat of translational innovation but as an ultimately accommodationist proposal for how Jews were to find a place in the modern German state and society. It aimed to achieve a new model for Jewish belonging that perfectly suited Rosenzweig's audience, for it did not demand the fundamental disruption of the social practices of the urban (and urbane) bourgeois German Jewry of which he was a part. It articulated a vision that accommodated the acculturation that was an established fact within Rosenzweig's social class, while appealing to the search for an authentic Jewish heritage that had been seemingly lost.

[4] The principal exception is Barbara E. Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations, and Translators* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). Her translation of the poems does a great service to English-speaking readers of Rosenzweig's work. A second translation of the poems into English was published as Franz Rosenzweig, *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, trans. Thomas A. Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). I am grateful to Zachary Braiterman for sharing the insights of his then-manuscript on the Halevi book with me; the book has since been published as Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[5] Buber and Rosenzweig worked on the translation jointly until Rosenzweig's death in 1929, when they had translated the books of the Bible up to Isaiah. Buber continued to translate the remainder of the Bible, completing the project in 1961.

TOWARD A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSLATION

The period in Rosenzweig's life following the publication of *Star* was consumed with the effort to render Hebrew letters, biblical worlds, and Jewish history a palpable presence in the German environment that had become alienated from, or had actively suppressed, the cultural possession of the Jews. His proposal for a textually centered, specifically Jewish identity in Germany appears in his correspondence from the time just before he undertook the Yehudah Halevi project. His elaboration of this concept directly coincides with his own translational work.

Rosenzweig viewed Halevi's poetry as representing the quickening of the scriptural corpus with the breath of the contemporary individual's life, and thus providing an invaluable resource for his own quest. His effort to bring the poetry to a German-speaking audience was no doubt as passionate as it was because it was deeply personal. For Rosenzweig, the figure of Halevi – apprehended not through his biography but rather by his textual legacy – became emblematic of a religious ideal inaccessible in the contemporary climate. Rosenzweig saw in Halevi the reflection of his own spiritual and textual quest; at the same time, the medieval poet and philosopher represented the authentic, rich Jewish past that Rosenzweig found so elusive. Consider the sense of poverty in the heritage most proximate to him that he expressed in a 1917 letter to his confidant Gertrud Oppenheim. It testifies to the superficiality Rosenzweig perceived as permeating his German-Jewish background, indicting his very name:

> Certainly I have no relationship to my first name. As to why, I naturally have only guesses. I believe that it's because my parents gave it to me without any connection to it, simply because they "liked" it (and why did they like it? Because it – *back then*! And in *Kassel*! – was still "different" ["apart"], only after me were there the other Franzes in the Kassel Jewish community . . .), that is to say, they saw it in a shop window, went in the store, and bought it. It has no inheritance, no memory in it, no history, and even less any anecdote, hardly any personality – only a whim. A family name, a saint's name, a hero's name, a poetic name, a mysterious name . . . – all of these are fine, all are somehow organic [*irgendwie gewachsen*], not bought at Whitley's.[6]

[6] See Letter 421 (August 21, 1917) to Trudi Oppenheim, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 1: 432. Ellipses and emphasis in original.

Rosenzweig contrasts his alienation from his own name – associated with the bourgeois ethic of consumption (a name "bought" on a frivolous whim) – with an organic but inaccessible ideal. This contrast is particularly striking when compared with Rosenzweig's deep identification with the name and person of Halevi. In a letter written to his mother the summer before his death, Rosenzweig inscribed a sense of spiritual kinship onto his genealogy. Pointing out that since his father's Hebrew name was Shmuel and his grandfather's Hebrew name was Yehudah, he wrote, "Correctly I should have been given the name Yehudah ben Shmuel [Judah, son of Samuel], which is precisely the name of the great man of whom I am a middling reincarnation on the way to transmigration: Yehudah [ben Shmuel] Halevi."[7] Rosenzweig's gesture toward renaming himself emerged out of an effort to be granted a more meaningful heritage. His felt connection to Halevi expressed simultaneously his dissatisfaction with the superficiality of the liberal-bourgeois heritage bestowed on him and his hopes for the possibility of actively constructing an alternative name and alternative history. Of all his published endeavors, his work on the poems of Halevi afforded Rosenzweig a deeply personal connection with the text. This sense of spiritual kinship gave the work tremendous passion.

This very identification with Halevi, however, also confused the boundaries between authorial voice, translation, innovation, and interpretation in the volume that emerged from the encounter. Rosenzweig's correspondence from the period of his labors on the translation and commentary attests to tensions within his thought about the goal and the approach of the project: Was the book's purpose to bring Halevi to a new readership? Or was it to provide a forum for Rosenzweig to express his own developing ideas on language, poetics, and translation?

[7] Letter 1245 (June 5, 1929) to his mother, in ibid., 2: 1216. Halevi's patronymic was ben Shmuel. Rosenzweig's father's Hebrew name was Samuel, as was Halevi's father's name; Rosenzweig's own Hebrew name was Levi. Rosenzweig thus builds on the tradition of naming a son after a deceased grandfather; his logic is that Judah (which means "lion") is the true equivalent of Louis – not Levi, which is the Hebrew name he was given. Although he was not a Levite (a descendant of the ancient caste of Temple caretakers known until today by the added name "haLevi" [the Levite]), Rosenzweig adds the Hebrew name he was given to the name he "should have" been given. Since his grandfather's name was Louis, his "proper" or rightful name, Rosenzweig suggested, was Yehudah ben Shmuel haLevi.

Rosenzweig's budding philosophy of translation exhibited a fruitful, if at times disquieting, tension with the assumed purpose of translation itself. He insisted upon both the direct encounter with the translated text and the legitimacy of his interpretive license in bringing the text to the reader. Both aspects of Rosenzweig's approach are visible in juxtaposing Rosenzweig's edition of Yehudah Halevi's poetry to that produced by Emil Cohn. In *Hymns and Poems*, Rosenzweig included the selected poems, an "afterword" commenting on the enterprise of translating Halevi into German, and then his own notes, which commented on theological, translational, and interpretive issues arising from each poem. Rosenzweig argued that the poems themselves constituted the main purpose of the book and the focus of his energies. "To translate ten lines is time better spent than [writing] the longest things 'about' [them]," Rosenzweig wrote to Buber in 1922. "Admittedly, the public wants the 'about' and abandons the most wonderful food (or, worse yet, gobbles it down unthinkingly) if you don't hold the menu right under its nose."[8] Any explanation, that is, spoils the delight of consuming the poetry itself. This frustration at his readership recurs throughout Rosenzweig's correspondence; his letters testify, furthermore, to his worry that readers would ignore Halevi's poetry in favor of what they perceived as the more accessible text – namely, his own afterword: "[Florens Christian] Rang is now the third one who has noticed that the afterword does not belong in there. The first two," Rosenzweig wrote to Buber, "are me and you. But the funny thing, which I knew beforehand, is that it's only the afterword that keeps the reader from throwing the book away from the start."[9]

The frequent recurrence of this lament raises suspicions; after all, Rosenzweig's book contained as much "about" as his rival Cohn's. It would seem that Rosenzweig doth protest too much. His book, rather than fighting the tendency to marginalize the poems themselves, actually accommodated his authorial voice; *Hymns and Poems* foregrounds Rosenzweig's commentary and afterword by design. For instance, in the first and second editions (both overseen by Rosenzweig), the poems are presented first, followed by his afterword, and concluding with his notes on each poem. The Hebrew original is not present. (The publishers of the third

[8] Letter 841 (December 20, 1922) to Buber, in ibid., 2: 875.
[9] Letter 941 (June 17, 1924) to Buber, in ibid., 2: 973.

[1983] edition made the book more accessible to scholars by placing each note alongside its corresponding poem and adding the Hebrew text.) Rosenzweig wrote to Buber in early 1924:

Regarding the sequence, I see the organization . . . not going from beginning to end but rather from the outer shell toward the middle. . . . That an exactly inversely-constructed book would be read just this way – this I indeed experienced with the *Star*. Now therefore under no circumstances do I want the snotty [*schnodderig*] afterword to be the conclusion of the book; the real conclusion is to be the last note. The afterword works only if it is as it is now, bound in front and back.[10]

Notably, the result of this organization is that Rosenzweig's own meditations, and not Halevi's verse, occupy the "heart" of the book. Much like a folio page of the Talmud, in which the central position is accorded to the most authoritative sources, Rosenzweig's afterword constitutes the privileged "middle" toward which the poetry (and his notes) point.[11]

Likewise, the premium that Rosenzweig wished to place on Halevi's material at times came into conflict with his own sense of artistic creativity: "I am still fiddling around with 'The Good News' ['Die Frohe Botschaft']," [12] Rosenzweig wrote to Buber, "but it remains a bad poem. I translated it only in order to be permitted to write the note on it." [13] The notes provided Rosenzweig with the freedom to present his own ideas, a freedom he exercised even as he endeavored to suppress the idea that the book was merely his own platform. The division Rosenzweig insisted on between translation, on the one hand, and afterword and commentary, on the other, aimed to reinforce the primacy of the poems over and above Rosenzweig's own subordinate additions. Yet *Hymns and Poems*, the only work in Rosenzweig's corpus explicitly presented as "text and commentary," in fact jettisoned Halevi's "original text" for a text entirely by Rosenzweig. In part because it was absent, the Hebrew could hold what Robert Alter has

[10] Letter 900 (January 8, 1924) to Buber, in ibid., 2: 938.

[11] I thank Peter Gordon for his insight about the resemblance of *Hymns and Poems*' structure in this regard to the organization of the Talmud page.

[12] "Yonat reḥokim nageni heitivi" in Dov Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh Le-Rabi Yehudah Ha-Levi*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: 1978), 3: 764.

[13] Letter 858 (March 1923) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 900–01.

called the "allure" of "the archaic as a source of authority and aesthetic power."[14] Rosenzweig's tactic heightened the authority of the (absent) Hebrew by keeping it ever out of reach, allowing him free rein in constructing an imaginary Hebrew in German letters.[15] Although he quite deliberately chose a format in which text and commentary would remain distinct, the entire book was thoroughly marked by an agenda defined by Rosenzweig himself.

This agenda is particularly visible when compared with the structure and content of Cohn's edition of the *dīwān*. The subtitle of Cohn's volume is emblematic of the differences between the two volumes: Cohn's forty-page biography, entitled "Yehudah Halevi, His Time, His Life, and His Work," provided an appendix for readers that placed Halevi's poetry into the context of the poet's biography and historical circumstances. Rosenzweig, by contrast, avoided or redirected any mention of historical themes or Halevi's life story. Rosenzweig decisively oriented his own reading of Halevi away from the aim of "educating" the readership or leading it to a scholarly encounter with the poetry.

To underscore the anti-historicist thrust of the book, Rosenzweig chose not to include a list of sources for the poems (in contrast to Cohn); instead, Rosenzweig included extensive notes (*Bemerkungen*), in which he expounded on the theological meaning of each poem, and the "afterword," in which he reflected on the task of translating Hebrew poetic language into German. Cohn followed the scholarly convention of leaving Halevi's poems untitled; Rosenzweig, by contrast, gave each of the poems a title that, for him, bespoke the essence of the poem. In addition, where Cohn had included poems concerning a wide range of topics (God; Israel; Love; Friendship, Life, Suffering, and Poetry; Zion; the Sea; and Final Days), Rosenzweig's *Hymns and Poems* consistently excluded poems usually classified as "secular." Rosenzweig sought instead to highlight and privilege the "religious" poems out of a conviction that religiosity – the same religiosity that

[14] Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 105.

[15] See the discussion of this phenomenon in relation to the Bible translation in Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

inspired him while working on the translations – should be made available to the reader.[16]

The deliberate choice to eliminate explicit historical and biographical explanation or accompaniment to the poetry in *Hymns and Poems* testifies to Rosenzweig's hermeneutic stance. He argued not that Cohn's book was historically inaccurate but rather that Cohn had either misconstrued or simply missed the transhistorical, theological significance of the poetry, reducing it to an epiphenomenon of history and biography. Rosenzweig's notes, as if in direct rebuke to Cohn, single-mindedly addressed the meaning of the poems for the contemporary reader. Rosenzweig sought to make Halevi and his passions immediate and proximate rather than historicized.[17] Rosenzweig's attempt to give voice to Halevi by excising the historical, explanatory mode present in Cohn's edition testifies to a post-historicist sensibility that animates *Hymns and Poems*.[18]

Rosenzweig's orientation in reading and recasting Halevi's poetry for his German-speaking audience interests us not just for its choice of interpretive stances. The choices he made as to the book's content and format were also expressions of a broader vision for the way readers – especially Jewish readers – could find a new source of identity in the ever-renewed meaning in classical texts. In constructing the volume around the location of the poems' religious meaning rather than their historical (or "antiquarian") significance,[19] Rosenzweig expressed a conviction that this model could be used for contemporary readers who sought a post-historicist encounter with the texts of the past.

[16] Rosenzweig explains his choice to emphasize the "religious" or liturgical poems cryptically; see *Gesammelte Schriften IV: Sprachdenken im Übersezten*. 1. *Band. Jehuda Halevi. Fünfundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte, Deutsch und Hebräisch*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 15; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 182.

[17] On Rosenzweig's antihistoricism, see my Introduction as well as Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism," in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1988); David Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[18] On German-Jewish hermeneutics in the early twentieth century, see Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[19] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

TRANSLATION AS PRAXIS

Translation was a practice that lent itself to contradictory aims and ideals in Rosenzweig's work. Rosenzweig exploited both the opacity of the translated text and its supposed transparency; he portrayed himself as laboring only for the cause of an accurate translation and simultaneously insisted on the necessity of interpretive license. These contradictions in the work of translation, while never resolved, lent a fruitful tension to his mature work.

Yet the volume of translated works Rosenzweig produced does not adequately capture the role that translation symbolized in his work. *Hymns and Poems*, like the translation projects that came before and after it, was, fundamentally, a call for a Jewish world built on language rather than on deed. This proposal for a textually centered Jewish identity appears in Rosenzweig's correspondence from the period just before he undertook the Halevi project. Rosenzweig's very first attempt at translation was undertaken jointly with his wife, Edith, while on their honeymoon, in early 1920. The text they tackled was the grace after meals.[20] Yet in a letter from the same period, Franz wrote to Edith about another, more practical aspect of mealtime: the degree to which the couple would adhere to traditional Jewish dietary restrictions:

> We want a *house*, not a ghetto. Any Jew whom we invite should be able to eat with us, but we also want to be able to go to the homes of those Christians who invite us. The Orthodox compromise – to go out but not eat (or only eat select things) – is really *only* a compromise. That this is "to the credit" of our *Jewish* friends who eat everything, whom we visit, is a shame. In the end they also should believe that our Jewishness does not consist in eating and drinking.[21]

The very week in which Rosenzweig rejected the implication that his Judaism should "consist in eating and drinking," he asserted, through his translation of the grace after meals, that the Jewish liturgical accompaniment to eating and drinking deserved a new German voice and a new German audience. Judaism, for Rosenzweig, did not concern what one ate – where eating was perceived as a system of physical and social

[20] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Tischdank* (Berlin: Fritz Gurlitt, 1920).
[21] Letter 621 (January 13, 1920) to Edith Hahn, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 659.

restrictions – but what one read. "Reading," with the help of Rosenzweig the translator, signified an activity that transcended all borders.

This argument will likely sound strange to readers familiar with Rosenzweig's famous letter to Martin Buber known as "The Builders."[22] That letter has widely been understood as signaling Rosenzweig's willingness to engage or even embrace the traditional Jewish commandments (*mitsvot*), and to do so fully aware of the Kantian critique of Jewish law that had bedeviled Jewish praxis since the beginning of the modern period. But Rosenzweig articulated in this letter a much more ambivalent relation to the *mitsvot* than has been widely appreciated. In his argument with Buber, Rosenzweig did not argue for the necessity or authority of the commandments but for the value of an open mind toward what the *mitsvot* and customs and traditions (*minhagim*) of Judaism might offer to the tentative individual engaging with them.[23] His work on Halevi, as the culmination of his early translational endeavors, shows his attempt to create a sphere in which the problems associated with the *mitsvot* – in particular, their demarcation of a separate social sphere for Jews – could be avoided. He aimed to create a poetic and liturgical, rather than a practical, Jewish sphere of life.

Rosenzweig's ambivalence toward the strictures of traditional Jewish ritual life persisted alongside his serious engagement of traditional Jewish prayer. Liturgy eventually became one of the few realms in which he expressed a wholesale willingness to submerge himself in the literary texts of the past, even as he increasingly transformed these texts into his own creations. In the new concept of Jewish praxis that Rosenzweig proposed, Jews were to perform their identity not primarily through the adherence to the traditional commandments – that is, through "eating and drinking" – but by viewing the world through the lens offered by what Rosenzweig called "Jewish words."[24] The Jew who would inhabit this home would

[22] Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Bauleute," in *Gesammelte Schriften III: Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984), 699–712. Translated as Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders," in *On Jewish Learning*, trans. N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

[23] For further analysis of "The Builders," see Arnold M. Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 7.

[24] Franz Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, eds. Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 131.

take up residence not in the synagogue or even in the domicile – a home that could all too easily become "a ghetto," as Franz reminded Edith – but in the Lehrhaus, where adult Jews would study Jewish texts together. For Rosenzweig, the engagement with Jewish texts would serve as an alternative to other dominant modes of Jewish expression: religious adherence such as that demanded by traditional Orthodoxy, liberal assimilationism, and Zionist political action. As an activity for the expression of Jewish being in the world, translation served Rosenzweig and his bourgeois, liberal audience well: it required neither adherence to Jewish religious practice nor the packing of bags for Palestine.

Moreover, the textual space created through the translation of Halevi's poetry was not to be exclusively Jewish. Rosenzweig's *Hymns and Poems* proposes a new kind of Jewish praxis for Jews attracted to neither Orthodoxy nor Zionism (or any combination thereof). Rosenzweig also envisioned his book as speaking to both Christian and Jewish audiences. Writing of his frustration in getting the book published, he wrote to Buber that he did not wish it to be published by a Jewish press. "My feeling is that it has become a book for Christians *and* Jews, although and because it speaks very Jewishly [*es sehr jüdisch spricht*]."[25] The *lingua franca* of the new realm was to be a Jewish language, yet literally, and simultaneously, German as well. Rosenzweig's aim was to create a German that could be more expansive than that which occupied the cultural center of his intellectual world but which, in his view, had no room for Hebrew (read: Jews) in it.[26]

In this effort to create a linguistic realm for the larger society, or even for humanity as a whole, based on a language marked as "Jewish," Rosenzweig participated in a project shared by Jewish intellectuals before and after his own time. Jewish languages – whether modernized, reclaimed, or transvalued – promised the possibility of an alternative,

[25] Letter 849 (February 4, 1923) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 659. Emphasis in original.

[26] On this concept, see Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 53. Translated as "Scripture and Luther," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 49. On the identification of the Hebrew language with the Jewish people in translational contexts, see Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 159.

superior language to those spoken in the worlds where Jews themselves were not always welcome.[27] Rosenzweig identified "scripture" – specifically biblical Hebrew – as having the power to strip German of its exclusive, monochromatic associations with Christendom and the state. Language held the key to both marginalization and redemption. Rosenzweig proposed to create a German that would be "foreign" to all of its speakers by "speaking Jewishly" and thus become the potential property of any and all of them. It is to this quixotic endeavor that we now turn.

AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

In rising to the challenge of besting Cohn's book, Rosenzweig began to develop his own unique aesthetic for translating Hebrew texts into German. Although *Hymns and Poems* shows, in Rosenzweig's choice of vocabulary and the fragmentary, patchwork narrative of the notes, the influence of both modernism and a Romantic reaction to it, the result is not reducible to literary choice alone.[28] Rather, Rosenzweig identified Halevi's poetry as manifesting a specific "scriptural" or "liturgical" element that became central to the cultural and political enterprise of *Hymns and Poems*. In this important respect, Halevi's poetry served as the testing ground for the translational approach that came to be widely associated with the Buber–Rosenzweig Bible translation. The "scriptural" quality that Rosenzweig saw in Halevi's poetry apparently led him to undertake the Bible translation several years later.

Rosenzweig's notes on the poems discuss at length this intrinsic connection between the medieval Hebrew poet's work and the Hebrew Bible and suggest that this connection had particular potency for Rosenzweig. He sought to create, through the translation of Halevi's Hebrew poetry, a German in which the classical Hebrew of Jewish scripture and

[27] See Amir Eshel, "Von Kafka bis Celan: Deutsch-Jüdische Schriftsteller und ihr Verhältnis zum Hebraïschen und Jiddischen," in *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und Jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 96–97.

[28] See Siegfried Kracauer, "The Bible in German," in *The Mass Ornament*, ed. Thomas Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Ernest Rubinstein, *An Episode of Jewish Romanticism: Franz Rosenzweig's "The Star of Redemption"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). On modernism in Rosenzweig, see Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation*; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*.

liturgy would form the horizons of the German language-field. The language of the Hebrew Bible was to provide German with the vocabulary, cadences, and reference points that had been marginalized before. The political implications of this enterprise come into view as we analyze Rosenzweig's remarks – both on the distinctive qualities of Halevi's poetry and on the relation of these qualities to the Bible.

The note on the first poem presented Rosenzweig with his first opportunity to allude to his new approach. The poem corresponding to the note, which Rosenzweig titled "Praised!" (*Gelobt!*), is a translation of Halevi's "Yah shimkha aromemekha" ("God, I Will Exalt Your Name"). Although the poem is too long to reproduce here in its entirety, the first stanzas of Rosenzweig's rendering (and Barbara Galli's English translation of them) give us a sense of Rosenzweig's tone:

Ja Herr Dich
dich rühme ich;
Dein Recht, durch mich
leucht' es weit.

Horch, ein Ton –
gehorch ich schon,
Frage schmilzt
und Widerstreit.

Und glich' es dem
nicht, wie wenn Lehm
den Töpfer: "Was
Tust du!" zieht?

Des ich verlang,
den ich empfang
zu Turm und Wehr
und Sicherheit:

All-um glühnd,
Geleucht aussprühnd,
schleierlos,
verhangbefreit –

Daβ gelobt,
O daβ umkränzt,
O daβ gerühmt
er, und geweiht.

Yes, Lord, You
You I praise;
your justice, through
me may it shine widely.

Hark, a tone –
I obey already,
question melts away
and strife.

And was it not as
if the clay
accused the potter
"What are you doing?"

Whom I desired,
whom I received
as a tower and defense
and security:

Shining all around,
sending forth light,
without a veil
freed of a cover –

That he be praised
Oh that he be garlanded
Oh that he be extolled
and consecrated.[29]

The four-fold refrain that closes these stanzas is Rosenzweig's rendering of Halevi's *yishtabaḥ veyitpaer veyitromem veyitnase'* ("may he be praised, glorified, extolled, and exalted"). These words echo the Kaddish, a resonant prayer in Jewish liturgy. Cohn, in his *Diwan*, excised the refrain entirely. Rosenzweig, by contrast, retained and visually offset the recurring chorus for emphasis. In his note on the poem, Rosenzweig pointedly remarked:

> The refrain here is, as is often the case, the nucleus of the poem, the point that every stanza empties out into and the one which determines its course.... Thus it is no coincidence that both the earliest and the most recent translators have simply left out the refrain, apparently because it repeats five times and therefore must be "tiresome."[30]

The critique is clear. Rosenzweig insisted that repetition was an irreducible aspect of the experience that the poem could incite in the reader. In doing so, he insinuated that those who, like Cohn, found Halevi's repetitions "tiresome" rejected precisely what made this poetry uniquely potent.

Rosenzweig's emphasis on and revaluing of the supposed blemishes of Halevi's verse forged a distinctive aesthetic, one Rosenzweig described, in speaking of one of the poems, as "unpoetic-superpoetic" (*undichterisch-überdichterisch*).[31] This aesthetic placed a premium on literal, even hyperliteral, translation, even or especially for features of the original that the translator might otherwise be tempted to smooth over so as to accommodate the text to the target language's conventions. Rosenzweig claimed that this approach was simply the one best suited to the poetry, but it grew out of his eagerness to reject what he perceived as bourgeois literary convention, in which a repeated phrase would more likely be found redundant than essential.

[29] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen,* 25; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 185.

[30] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen,* 181; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 251.

[31] Buber and Rosenzweig attributed significance and intentionality to these repetitions without ever making explicit claims about the authorship of the Bible (see Chapter 4 for further discussion).

This attitude moved Rosenzweig toward the distinctive style of translation that culminated in the Bible translation, a project that gained much attention for its deliberately awkward – or, as Rosenzweig argued, its authentically Hebraic – vocabulary and style. In the Bible translation, Buber and Rosenzweig both developed a style that emphasized the distinctive economy of biblical Hebrew. Their invention of neologisms and their insistent use of highly unusual German phrasing and word choice were, for them, necessary accommodations to the original text. All of these efforts were designed to compel the reader to appreciate the recurring linguistic patterns in the Bible.[32] Just as Rosenzweig portrayed Halevi's poems as "unpoetic-superpoetic," so too would he eventually call the Bible "unaesthetic-superaesthetic," and "poetic only against its will."[33] This aesthetic, much debated by cultural critics as the Bible translation began to appear, has been described by Peter Gordon as "archaic modernism" and rightly recognized as an expression of modernism rather than as a simple rejection of it.[34] Rosenzweig's insistence on retaining the "repetitions" in Halevi's poem represented the first step toward this translational approach.

Rosenzweig's determination to preserve the "tiresome," repetitive Hebrew in spite of the dictates of "good taste" was the product of an aesthetic agenda, but it was an agenda bolstered by social and political concerns. As stated in the book's Afterword, Rosenzweig's goal was "not to Germanize what is foreign but to make foreign what is German" (*nicht das Fremde einzudeutschen, sondern das Deutsche umzufremden*).[35]

[32] Letter 1154 (May 30, 1927) to Trudi Oppenheim, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1153. See also Letter 1173 (Sept. 2, 1927) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1171.

[33] On "archaic modernism" in the Bible translation, see Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*. For other treatments of the aesthetics and philosophy of the Bible translation, see Martin Jay, "Politics of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber–Rosenzweig Bible," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 21 (1976); Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[34] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen,* 1; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 169–70.

[35] Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Shocken, 1936). Translation published as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (1936; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

He believed that the retention of what he claimed were the characteristic elements in Halevi's poetry amounted to an act of defiance, and even of cultural resistance. He constructed this distinctiveness in his translations as emblematic of a more important cause: the ability of the difference and "otherness" of Hebrew to persist in the dominant German environment. This agenda first appeared in *Hymns and Poems* and then gained full expression in the Bible translation and Rosenzweig's working papers on the latter project (published in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*).[36] In both cases, Rosenzweig's main concern was to demand recognition, rather than assimilation, of the "foreignness" that, he claimed, inhabited the German linguistic field. His goal in this effort reached beyond the limited aims of what we might be tempted to call multiculturalism; rather, in seeking to "foreignize" German (*das Deutsche umzufremden*), Rosenzweig sought a kind of reverse assimilation, in which the Hebrew (and, by tacit extension, the Jewish) would modify the German. The echoes of a broader debate on the proper strategy for perpetuating Jewish existence in the dominant German environment, though never explicit, are resonant within this argument. Rosenzweig's position is unique, however, in that it identified the Hebrew Bible – the scriptures as read by Jews in particular – as the key to making German unfamiliar to itself.

MUSIVSTIL AS EXILIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Rosenzweig's signature translational style was first developed through his work on Halevi. This style characterized the approach to the Bible that was more widely read – and often decried – by contemporaneous critics and recent scholars alike. But this connection between the two bodies of literature was, for Rosenzweig, not incidental but organic and unified.

The link between the poetry of Halevi and the Bible centered on the prominence of "inlaid style" (*Musivstil*) in Halevi's poetry. *Musivstil* refers to the heavily intertextual element of medieval Hebrew poetry vis-à-vis the Bible, in which passages from the Bible are "inlaid," as in a mosaic, within the poem.[37] Halevi's poetry, like that of other medieval Andalusian Hebrew poets, is steeped in the widely recognized

[36] See Chapter 4.

[37] Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 24.

convention of tessellation (*shibuts*). For Rosenzweig, this stylistic feature of Halevi's poetry revealed a critical and characteristic element of Jewish Andalusian poetry in general: "It [medieval Spanish Hebrew poetry] allows itself what is effective in language [*Sprachwirkliche*], only what is provable in Scripture. 'Scripture' [*die 'Schrift'*], not 'language' [*die 'Sprache'*], is the norm here."[38]

It was not so much the literary implications as the philosophical implications of tessellation that interested Rosenzweig. In his eyes, Halevi's reliance on *Musivstil* gave his poetry an exilic quality in which the poet's primary reference points were not his own contemporary circumstances but the biblical world from which he had been temporally and geographically exiled. Rosenzweig's attention to the way Halevi exiled himself from the surrounding world through the use of biblical references reveals Rosenzweig's own attempt to define an alternative locus and orientation for contemporary Jewish-German life in his own era.

For Rosenzweig, *Musivstil* proposed a mandate for a mode of being in the world that he himself sought to develop. On the basis of the prevalence of biblical allusion in medieval Hebrew Andalusian poetry, Rosenzweig concluded, "All Jewish poetry in exile refuses to ignore its being-in-exile [*ihr im-Exil-Sein*]."[39] *Musivstil* revealed this quality of Jewish existence, for Rosenzweig, because the "inlaid style" interrupts and fragments the present of the poem and, by extension, the poet's present, with biblical references. Although it might just as easily be concluded that this form of intertextuality in fact assimilates the biblical past into the present and harmonizes it with the poet's post-biblical reality, Rosenzweig draws the opposite conclusion: *Musivstil* amounts to "exiling of the surrounding world" through "the constant pressure of the scriptures."[40] Note here that, in Rosenzweig's conception, the Jewish poet participates in enacting this exile by driving out the world so as to reside in the text. The task, Rosenzweig concludes, is not to end the exile but to preserve it; not to flourish in spite of it but to flourish because of it.

[38] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 166; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 244–5.

[39] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 10; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 177. Peter Gordon has commented on Rosenzweig's idea of "*in* Golus *sein*," which appears in several of his letters to Rudolf Hallo in 1921 and 1922; see Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 219.

[40] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 10; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 177.

Rosenzweig ignores the historical circumstances that resulted in exile as a condition, and instead seizes on an exilic Jewish consciousness that, in his view, medieval poetry both exhibits and actively creates:

> This exiling of the surrounding world is achieved through the persistent presence of the scriptural word. With it, another [world] thrusts itself in front of the surrounding one and reduces the latter to an appearance, or more precisely, to a parable [*Gleichnis*]. Thus it is not that the scriptural word is drawn upon, in the manner of a parable, as an illustration of the life of the present, but exactly the opposite: events serve as an elucidation of the scriptural word and become the parable of it. Thus the relationship is exactly the opposite of what we imagine from the expression "inlaid style." . . . When a Jewish poet represents Christianity and Islam with Edom and Ishmael, he is not commenting on the present on the basis of scripture, but rather on scripture on the basis of the present.[41]

On the surface, this critical passage defines what Rosenzweig holds to be the essential characteristic of Hebrew medieval poetry: the use of scriptural allusions and metaphors to overtake the contemporary world, subordinating it to the world of the Bible. But the significance of this statement goes far beyond the scope of literary history. Rosenzweig proposes none other than an ideal relationship between the world of ordinary language and ordinary historical time, on the one hand, and the world of biblical language and the mythical axes on which the biblical world turns, on the other. For Rosenzweig, Halevi achieved this ideal: his vocabulary was "essentially purely biblical," yet his poetry, like liturgy, transformed the words of the Bible into living speech, much as "a word that appears in daily prayer is familiar even if the concordance lists it as a *hapax legomenon*,"[42] a word that appears only once in the biblical lexicon.

Rosenzweig saw the poet's achievement as that of quickening the biblical vocabulary with the breath of his own life and speech, and thus turning it into an orientation in the world. By placing the words of the Bible within the poetry of medieval Andalusia, Halevi had, in Rosenzweig's eyes, created not so much a synthesis as a form of resistance. Rosenzweig, in turn, aimed to give new life to Halevi's words in contemporary German

[41] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 10; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 177.

[42] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 12; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 179.

and thus to set forth a model of Jewish exilic consciousness, in which he, like the poet, would resist incorporation or assimilation into the dominant cultural sphere by making the German foreign to itself (*das Deutsche umzufremden*). In doing so, Rosenzweig ironically conformed to the pattern of so many Weimar Jewish intellectuals who claimed to distance themselves from Weimar culture, and in doing so, proved themselves to be among its most enthusiastic participants.[43]

LITURGY AS LIVING SCRIPTURE: ON GOD, THE SOUL, AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The loosely constructed, almost impressionist arrangement that Rosenzweig chose for *Hymns and Poems* does not resemble any other printed collection of Yehudah Halevi's poetry.[44] It bears instead the unmistakable markings of Rosenzweig's own preoccupations. The four-part division of the poems into sections called God, Soul, People, and Zion charts a movement from the individual soul before God to Jewish participation in the experience of communal redemption, followed by a coda in which the individual – in this case, Halevi as read through the eyes of Rosenzweig – reaches his own ultimate destiny in redemptive death in Zion. The progression recalls the trajectory of *The Star of Redemption*, but the method of presentation, the tone, and the format are distinctive.

The decisively non-systematic form of *Hymns and Poems* comprised a critical element of the project.[45] Yet detectable within the four-fold metastructure are a few decisive themes, which together create a forum for

[43] This trope has been famously analyzed in Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (1968; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). For more specific discussions of this phenomenon in Rosenzweig, see Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*.

[44] Rosenzweig primarily consulted two editions of Halevi's poems: Samuel David Luzzatto, *Dīwān Rabi Yehuda Haleivi* (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1864) and Ḥayyim Brody, ed., *Dīwān des Yehuda Ben Shemuel Haleivi*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Mikize Nirdamim, 1894–1930). Note that the pages numbers given by Rosenzweig (listed in the commentary section of Galli's edition) correspond to the Brody edition.

[45] Rosenzweig wrote to Richard Koch, "A critic of the Halevi book in the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* who knows me as a writer on Hegel, writes, '... He states the guiding principles that form his method in an afterword and in the notes on each poem. In this "commentary" is hidden an entire philosophy of speech! One can only wish that Rosenzweig had presented his knowledge of these things once in systematic form: what he has said up to this point about them are aphoristic reflections or historical claims that in the form presented cannot be correctly ascertained.' What can I say to this!" [Letter number 1213 (September 2, 1928) to Richard Koch, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1197].

pursuing the topics most central to Rosenzweig's religious thought: the nature of revelation, the role of scripture in providing the raw material for the language of revelation, and the routinizing of this scriptural revelation through the Jewish holiday cycle. In addition, Rosenzweig highlighted themes that, though traceable back to *Star*, found full expression in the commentary to Halevi's poems: the nature of the individual prayer and the longing of the soul for messianic redemption.

The book's opening salvo is aimed at the "cultured despisers" of his own generation; the subject of the first section, entitled "God," is not God at all, but the human experience of prayer. The section begins with a cluster of poems that, in Rosenzweig's reading, concern the attempt of the individual to pray. Responding not so much to Halevi as to more proximate nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German religious thinkers, Rosenzweig suggests that the intellectual problem of the historical revelation evaporates in the experience of standing in direct relation to God. This direct communication is, for Rosenzweig, the essence and goal of prayer.

From the very beginning, in the first poem, the inner life of the person at prayer is intertwined with the words of the traditional prayerbook and the Bible. For Rosenzweig, the phenomenological account of standing before God in prayer is expressed best in Halevi's invocation of Sinai: writing of his nocturnal vision of God, Halevi asserts, "And my heart saw you and believed, as if I was standing at Sinai."[46] For Rosenzweig, writing in the commentary on the poem, this line asserts that "the experience of today confirms and repeats the historical revelation."[47] It is in this context that Rosenzweig declared, famously, "God reveals in revelation always only – revelation." It is a maxim that echoes *Star*'s emphasis on the contentlessness of revelation, or, as Rosenzweig put it there, a "revelation that posits nothing"[48]; a revelation "that is nothing more than revelation, a revelation in the narrower – no, in the narrowest sense."[49]

[46] "Ye'iruni veshimkha ra'ayonai" in Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 2: 417.

[47] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 28; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 187.

[48] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften II: Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 179; Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 161.

[49] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1930; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), 179; Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 161.

Maintaining this position enabled Rosenzweig to take his argument in two seemingly divergent directions: on the one hand, he could hold that revelation has no essential content, protecting it from rational scrutiny and historical deconstruction; on the other, he could endow it with the absolute power of a transformative event that he would represent with the words of the Hebrew Bible.

In the context of his note on Halevi's poem, Rosenzweig is more explicit about the implications of this assertion than he had been in *Star*. The personal confirmation of the communal, historical event does not "solve" the problem of belief in the historical revelation, Rosenzweig argues, but "moves [the problem] into the past" so that it is no longer relevant: "Out of the problem of thought," he concludes, "a strength of heart emerges."[50] Revelation is thus not a singular historical occurrence but an event that erupts whenever a human being encounters God without mediation. This encounter grants the human being a place at Sinai. The "follower at second hand," to use Kierkegaard's phrase, equals or surpasses the experience of revelation enjoyed by the Israelites who stood at the historico-mythical Sinai. The fact that "standing at Sinai" serves as Rosenzweig's shorthand for revelation testifies to an implicit transformation in the meaning of Sinai from singular event to metaphor.

The second part of *Hymns and Poems*, entitled "Soul," shifts the topic of Rosenzweig's meditations from the phenomenology of prayer to the connection between prayer and the words of the scriptures in which so much of Jewish liturgy is rooted. This section begins with the individual's desire for the experience of revelation (the focus of the "God" section) and ends with the "return to the people," reflecting Rosenzweig's conviction that the individual soul is the channel through which divinity must travel to find a place in the communal structure that is the people. As in *Star*, God first speaks directly to the individual before becoming publicly manifest in the communal life of Jews and Christians; revelation does not involve a past theophany at Sinai but the timeless awakening of the single soul to God's voice. The first section, "God," dwells on the isolation of the human being reaching out to God, as in *Star* Part I, Book III; the second section, "Soul," mirrors *Star* Part II,

[50] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 29; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 188.

Book I, in which the human being and God meet each other in the language of the Bible.

The first poem in this section, usually classified in Halevi collections as a poem for Rosh Hashana, is titled "Here am I" in Rosenzweig's volume.[51] Halevi's poem displays manifold intertextual reinterpretations in which theological innovation is the inevitable result. But surely it was the last line ("God, answer me; do not be silent and oppress me; answer your servant and say, 'Here am I' ") that caught Rosenzweig's attention. Here the poet expresses the fervent desire to hear God declare "Here am I" in response to his cry of distress. Buoyed by Isaiah 58:9 ("You shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say "Here am I"), Halevi rereads the prophetic promise of God's proximity to the people Israel – traditionally understood as the reward for their righteousness – as God's response to the individual poet's need and anguish. The distinctiveness of Isaiah's words here is found in contrast to almost every case where the formula "Here am I" appears – in the speech of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah – in which God calls the human being. In each of these cases, the answer "Here am I" bespeaks the prophet's willingness to hear God's call and accept God's mission.

Rosenzweig seizes upon this rereading of the classic biblical expression of presence and assent to the divine call. Whereas in *The Star of Redemption*, "Here am I" becomes the cry of the soul to God, in Halevi's poem it is the response of God to the soul. Rosenzweig's comment on the poem concentrates almost exclusively on this final line, declaring, "The human being can call 'Here am I' because the echo of this word returns to him from God's mouth."[52] Rosenzweig's note softens the radicalism of Isaiah's promise and Halevi's assertion; he brings the poem's call to God into agreement with his implicit claim in *Star* that human beings speak only because God first spoke to them.

In both of these works, the human being's capacity for speech originates in God's prior, originary speech. And in *Hymns and Poems*, as in *Star*, this speech is at its essence *scriptural* speech; it is the '*hineni*' of the Pentateuch and prophets that now resounds in the mouth of the "latecomer" to divine revelation as well. Moreover, also as in *Star*,

[51] "Mi yiteneni," in Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 1: 64.

[52] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 91; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 213.

Rosenzweig suggests that God's word as represented in the Bible initiates the relationship between God and the human being and the eventual dialogue between them. Ultimately, however, humanity and God jointly partake in the speech that was once the province only of God. Thus even if the vector of revelation always travels from God to the human being, the biblical speech of the revelatory encounter becomes the basis of true dialogue, in which humans then use scriptural words to address God. The bridge that leads from the scriptural to the liturgical element of Halevi is precisely this dialogue. The call and response that occurs between human beings and God, always through the words of scripture, becomes the very essence of prayer.

The commentary on the first two sections of the Halevi volume serves as the site for expressing the longing for God that is the hallmark, for Rosenzweig, of revelation. With the second half of the book, the yearning gives way to visions of fulfillment. The revelation of God to the soul, as we know from *Star*, always contains within it an element of lack and absence; it points to the "not yet" of the Kingdom of God, or, as Rosenzweig wrote, the longing of the soul for the publicly manifest God whom she could "kiss in the street."[53] But this longing is assuaged, in the Halevi book, by two things: first, by membership in the collective; second, by the hope in the messianic ideal that is the true meaning of Zion. These are the topics that occupy the second half of the Halevi book.

In the third section of the *Hymns and Poems of Yehudah Halevi*, entitled "People" [*Volk*], Rosenzweig grapples with the way in which the people Israel, in its history of exile and longing for God, animates the words of the Bible and brings them to their full meaning. Insofar as Rosenzweig accorded a place of prominence to the Jewish people, he was forced to wrestle with a problem that vexed German-Jewish intellectual history since the time of the Enlightenment: could the distinctiveness of the Jewish people be asserted without sustaining damage to their ability to integrate fully into their non-Jewish surroundings? The challenge is perceptible in the recurring discussion of the uniqueness of the people Israel:

> They [the people] know themselves, in oppression and concealment, as the promised Messiah, Isaiah's servant of God. As so many have understood, from days of old up through Hermann Cohen, the poet understood Israel's

[53] See Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 228/203.

fate, as in his philosophical work, as expiation for the world's suffering and as glory that redeems the world.[54]

Although he did not engage the topic as systematically as had his teacher Hermann Cohen, Rosenzweig extended the latter's understanding of Jewish monotheism as the purest universalism through an encounter with the "sources of Judaism."[55] Like Cohen, Rosenzweig sought to justify the Jews' particular identity by giving it universal significance. Halevi's poetry comes to his aid in doing so. Through Halevi's poetry, Rosenzweig maps creation, revelation, and redemption onto the "pagan" world of nature.

We see this technique most manifestly in the sub-narrative organized around the theme of light. The titles Rosenzweig gives to the poems here include "Festival of Lights," "Light," "Conquered Darkness"; many of the other poems also use this motif. Explaining the connection of light to the people, Rosenzweig builds upon what he portrays as the simultaneously universal and particular symbol of light in his comment on "Conquered Darkness": "The connection between the creation of light and the renewal of the dying [*erloschenen*] light of the people – the people whose sanctuary is grounded on the foundational stone of the world – is an inexhaustible theme."[56]

[54] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 155; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 238.

[55] In April 1918, Rosenzweig obtained a manuscript copy of what was eventually published posthumously as Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*. The book, which spurred Rosenzweig to begin work on *Star* that same year, makes clear that scripture did not offer any "truths" that conflicted with those established and confirmed by reason; positively stated, Cohen believed that scripture contained an inner rational, philosophical meaning. But unlike his privileged interlocutor, Kant, Cohen wanted to show the suitability, even the ideal nature, of Judaism as a religion of reason. [Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Greene and Hoyt (1793; New York: Harper, 1960), 116–17.] To that end, Cohen made the bold, at times awkward, argument that a "religion of reason" can be found in the "sources of Judaism." Cohen recognized and acknowledged that this effort relied on a hermeneutical circle: "It is impossible to develop a unifying concept of Judaism out of the literary sources unless the concept of Judaism itself is anticipated as an ideal project. . . ." [Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (1919; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 3.] Whether this circularity is productive or vicious is a matter of debate; Cohen himself averred that the distinction between the "sources of Judaism" and "Jewish sources" ensured the legitimacy of his hermeneutic approach. On this point, see Gordon, *Rozenzweig and Heidegger*, 55.

[56] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 153; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 237–8. The note concerns Yehudah Halevi's poem "Yonat 'eilem tzeki laḥashekh" (Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 3: 729.)

To make sense of this cryptic comment, we must note that the refrain of the poem begins with *yotzer 'or uvoreḥoshekh*: "He who forms light and creates darkness," a phrase taken directly from the Jewish morning liturgy, which, as Rosenzweig notes, itself comes from Isaiah 45:7.[57] Each refrain in Halevi's poem alters the words but ends with the word "darkness." The final line, in the voice of the dove Israel, ends "Behold, the light of the rock of my prayer; he is mine as I dwell in darkness." The connection furthermore emerges from two biblical and liturgical references that Rosenzweig implicitly links to each other. The first, from Isaiah 42:6, promises that Israel will be a "light unto the nations" (*'or lagoyim*); the second, from the morning liturgy, declares, "A new light shall shine upon Zion" (*'or ḥadash 'al tziyon ta'ir*). The theme of light links the creative activity of God to the people who reflect this light; it then reemerges as the redemptive light that shines upon the future Zion.

For Rosenzweig, the Jewish people understands that its prayers for redemption are to be addressed to the one who creates light and darkness. That this is so reveals their knowledge that their true, pure universalism constitutes their distinctiveness. As Rosenzweig writes in a comment on "On the Day of the Reed Sea," "The God of the renewal of the world is Israel's God of old." It is thus not their particularism that makes the people universal, but the reverse. The enduring influence of Hermann Cohen on Rosenzweig is manifest in Rosenzweig's implication that the people's uniqueness lies in its knowledge of its kinship with the one God.

Yet, at the same time, Rosenzweig is not totally willing to ascribe even this minimal distinction to "the chosen people." He remains elusive, refusing even to identify the people as a collective body, preferring instead to reduce it to the individual human being *per se,* or to the poet who speaks on humanity's behalf in a single voice. In his comment on "My King,"[58] Rosenzweig suggests that it is not Israel but the "human being" who "stands in between the words of God that call forth light at the beginning and the end of days."[59] And Rosenzweig glosses the poem

[57] The second half of the line from the morning liturgy departs from Isaiah 45:7. The prophetic verse states, "I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil"; the Jewish morning liturgy gives this verse a theologically sanitized ending: "I make peace and create all."

[58] "Yif'at malki," Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 3: 759.

[59] Rosenzweig refers here to Isaiah 60:1: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you."

"Angry Love"[60] with the words "And then comes the outcry – one can scarcely dare to believe one's ears – where *Israel as the one human being* stands upright before the one God and binds God's omnipotence to the redemption which he owes Israel."[61]

This obscuring of the meaning of "Israel" or "the Jewish people" echoes the collective singular in the third part of *Star*. But in Rosenzweig's commentary on Halevi's poems, Halevi the poet is the human being who stands for both himself and the collective he represents: "The poet does not let [the people] speak; he speaks. He speaks not behind the mask of the people, but out of the people of whom he is himself a member."[62] It is this merging of the personal or subjective with the communal that enables Halevi, in Rosenzweig's eyes, to then voice "a reverberation of the prophetic polemic."[63] It is only through this act of simultaneously subjecting himself to scripture and strong-arming it to serve his own vision that Halevi could echo the call of the prophets and at the same time add something new to it. It is as close as we ever come to a statement of Rosenzweig's own vision of himself vis-à-vis the Jewish people.

One of the last notes in this section shows the possibilities for understanding how scripture can resolve the tension within Rosenzweig's thought concerning the distinctiveness and particularity of the chosen people. In one of the closing lines of "Faithfulness,"[64] Yehudah Halevi writes, in the voice of God speaking to Israel (indicated by the singular feminine): "You chose me, and I also choose you" (*baḥart bi gam bakh 'ani boḥer*). Quoting, in his comment, the midrash according to which God dons *tefillin* each morning that contain a verse praising Israel's uniqueness,[65] Rosenzweig focuses on the reciprocity [*Gegenseitigkeit*] that for him dominates the poem:

[60] "Yedidi hashakhaḥta ḥanotekh bevein shadai," Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 2: 327.

[61] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 187; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 254. Italics mine.

[62] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 185; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 253.

[63] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 178; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 250.

[64] "Yod'i hefitzuni," in Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 2: 352.

[65] "Rav Naḥman bar Isaac said to Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin: What is written in the *tefillin* of the Lord of the Universe? He replied to him: 'And who is like Your people Israel, a nation unique in the earth? [I Chronicles 17:21]' " (BT Berachot 6a). Rosenzweig refers to Deuteronomy 6:4ff., which is traditionally written on parchment in *tefillin* boxes, and quotes the verse from Chronicles. He does not, however, give the source of the midrash relating these texts to each other.

To the human's confession of faith to the unique God there resounds back God's confession of faith to the unique people – to the people for whom the fates of the fathers – Isaac's readiness for sacrifice, Jacob's wiles and suffering about who was the first-born, Abraham's friendship with God – have become lines in their three-thousand-year-old face.[66]

This passage might be read to indicate that while the human being [*Mensch*] first confesses faith to the one God, God's response does not answer the human being as such directly. God's response is a confession of faith not to the *Mensch* but to the unnamed *Volk* that bears the marks of biblical history. Yet Rosenzweig's awkward elision of the human being and the Jew can be explained as an effort to universalize the meaning of the Jewish people. When the human being confesses faith to – faith not *in* but *to* – the unique God, God responds with the love that marks the text of the Bible and shapes the narrative of the people Israel within it.[67] When this occurs, the true meaning of the people Israel has been revealed: this people knows the story of the human being as such. Its mission is to know and tell this human story to the world.

THE SCRIPTURAL ZION

The scriptural, exilic consciousness that Rosenzweig attempted to forge with *Hymns and Poems* is illustrated most forcefully the way in the way he addressed the question of home and homelessness. The relation of the poet and pilgrim to the Holy Land had been a focal point for interpreters of Halevi since the beginning of the Jewish Enlightenment, when the predominance of Zion-themed poems and Halevi's own biography served as lightning rods for questions of home, exile, diaspora, and acculturation. These nineteenth-century interpretations informed the contours of Rosenzweig's reading of Zion in Halevi. Yet Rosenzweig's novel, almost existentialist interpretation of "Zion" in the Halevi poems is entirely his own. Rosenzweig's commentary on the poems concerning

[66] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 191; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 256.

[67] The distinction I note concerns Rosenzweig's characteristic reluctance to accord the relationship between God and human being/s any specific content. That the people confess faith *to,* not *in,* God, suggests that they declare faithfulness to God rather than espousing a belief in God. The latter, for Rosenzweig, implies dogma and content, both of which he believed were anathema to the authentic experience of revelation.

Zion serves as a rich source for understanding how he aimed to excavate the scriptural layer of Halevi's poetry and rebuild it as an alternative locus for German-Jewish belonging. Moreover, Rosenzweig's notes on Zion both amplify and shift the tone of his better-known remarks in *The Star of Redemption* toward a concept of a "scriptural" Zion.

The content of this section was shaped in great measure by tensions inherited over the course of a century of contradictory Jewish encounters with Halevi and what he seemed to represent, from the Enlightenment through Weimar. The history of Halevi interpretation shows that a wide variety of post-Enlightenment readers found in him what they hoped to find.[68] This seems particularly true for appropriations of Halevi concerning social and political orientations toward, or away from, the "holy land." Throughout the nineteenth century, as Adam Shear has observed, a "'cosmopolitan' Halevi coexisted with a 'nationalistic' Halevi."[69] For maskilic readers such as Samuel David Luzzatto, Leopold Zunz, and others, Halevi was the paragon of a thriving diaspora Jew, whose cosmopolitan yet fiercely particularistic poetry represented the possibility of flourishing in two cultures at once. This "cosmopolitan" Halevi was identified with the "Golden Age" of Spain, an era idealized by German-Jewish *maskilim* as "a paradigmatic model of Jewish integration and acculturation."[70] Maskilic interest led to the publication, for the first time, of collections of Halevi's poetic works (which had until then been known only via their inclusion in the daily and holiday prayer books of local communities).[71]

The "nationalist" Halevi, meanwhile, was favored as the Zionist movement took root in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A resurgence of Romantic nationalism attracted Jewish philosophers and activists to Halevi once again, but for different purposes from those

[68] Shumuel Werses, *Megamot Vetsurot Besifrut Hahaskalah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990).

[69] Adam Shear, "Judah Halevi's Kuzari in the Haskalah: The Reinterpretation and Reimagining of a Medieval Work," in *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From Al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, eds. Adam Sutcliffe and Ross Brann (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 84.

[70] Adam Shear, "The Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in the Reception of Judah Halevi's 'Sefer Ha-Kuzari' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 512–34. See also Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 17–18.

[71] See Shear, "Judah Halevi's Kuzari in the Haskalah," 73.

that motivated the maskilim. For some Jewish intellectuals such as Isaac Breuer, Halevi's famous philosophical work, the *Kuzari*, became the focal point of interest during the 1920s as new justifications for Jewish particularity were sought out. David Myers has explained this philosophical interest in Halevi as "a form of dissent from the ideal of Enlightenment rationalism, whose celebrated prototype was Maimonides."[72] Indeed, in the climate of deep disillusionment following World War I, the *Kuzari*'s lack of emphasis on human reason in the schema of redemption resonated deeply among some Jewish religious thinkers. And turn-of-the-century Zionist thinkers found in the figure of Halevi himself, especially as pilgrim to the Holy Land, a source for their own efforts to make a Jewish homeland in Palestine a tangible reality. Halevi's image as a passionate defender of a particularist Jewish identity and the role of divine providence in Jewish history appealed to the Ḥibbat Tsiyon movement, whose poets glorified Halevi in their search for their own ideological predecessors.[73]

Rosenzweig's reading adds another layer to this complex *Rezeptionsgechichte*. Like the *maskilim*, Rosenzweig embraced Halevi as a model of diasporic Jewish life. Like the romantic nationalists, Rosenzweig gravitated toward Halevi's unapologetically essentialist concept of Jewish peoplehood. And just as Zionist readers seized on Halevi's longing to make his home in Zion, Rosenzweig was drawn to the poet's story of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Yet Rosenzweig's take on Halevi cannot be reduced to any of these readings. Rather, he saw in Halevi the model for the construction of a scriptural world, in which the words of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish liturgy would create a distinctive and textually oriented world within the diaspora. Nowhere does Rosenzweig's unique take on Halevi come into view as sharply as in his struggle to interpret the meaning of Zion.

The first several notes on the poems in the "Zion" section focus on the specifically future-oriented nature of Jewish messianic hope. The note on the poem "The Good News" ("Die Frohe Botschaft") – Rosenzweig's chosen title is striking – focuses on Jewish messianic expectations and

[72] Myers, *Resisting History*, 131–2. Adam Shear has noted that this typology of Halevi (the anti-rationalist) versus Maimonides (the rationalist) must itself be historicized and placed in the context of the "prevailing view of twentieth-century scholarship" (Shear, "Judah Halevi's Kuzari in the Haskalah," 85).

[73] Shear, "Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book," 512–34.

hopes, declaring, "For rightfully has [Halevi's] publisher Luzzatto assumed – Geiger's opposition and that of others has not convinced me – that it arose under the immediate influence of news about the appearance of a messianic pretender."[74] The comment seeks to make clear that messianic hopes – even the hope in a false messiah – must be taken utterly seriously. Rosenzweig's point is not historical but metahistorical; continuing, he writes that the expectation of the Messiah (*Erwartung des Messias*) is that "because of which and for the sake of which Judaism lives."[75]

A comparison with *The Star of Redemption* is instructive. Readers of that work will recall that Rosenzweig declared the Jewish people to be "the eternal people" who "bind creation as a whole to redemption while redemption is still to come."[76] This group alone constitutes a "community of fate," a "redeemed community" that uniquely enacts the possibility of living "with God."[77] The Jewish people's fundamental inability to have any territorial foothold in space and its existence outside of the history of the nations demonstrate this community's anticipatory enactment of redemption. In the Halevi book, elements of this view find greater elaboration and definition: *Star*'s emphasis on the Jewish people's unique manifestation or modeling of redemption is secondary to the people's longing for redemption, which now receives fuller accentuation. In *Hymns and Poems*, the Jews' exilic, diasporic condition is their eternal burden and *raison d'être*; Jewish expectation of the Messiah leads neither the Jews nor the world as a whole closer to the *telos* of history. (The Christians of *Star*, eternally "on the way" in their progression toward redemption, served to draw the world toward its *telos* in that work.) The note on the next poem, "The Calculation of Salvation,"[78] confirms this observation. Rosenzweig

[74] Raymond Scheindlin argues that within a medieval context in which all Hebrew poets "wrote extensively of Israel's suffering in exile and longing for redemption, and many wrote passionate prayers for the coming of the messiah," Halevi's own work suggests that he "was convinced by calculations that placed the messianic redemption in his own lifetime . . ." Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[75] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 202–03; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 259.

[76] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 372/335.

[77] See Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 207–20; Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 72–77.

[78] "Yonat reḥokim nadadah ya'ara," in Jarden, ed., *Shire Ha-Kodesh*, 3: 827. For an English translation, see Heinrich Brody, *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, trans. Nina Salaman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), 118.

focuses on the repeated despair of arriving at the calculated time of the Messiah's arrival and the renewed faith that comes in the wake of the deferral of redemption. His note suggests that Jews' continually potent yet unfulfilled hopes for the messiah's imminent arrival must *remain* unfulfilled in order for Judaism to retain its meaning.[79]

In the notes immediately following, Rosenzweig links the Jews' eternally frustrated messianic expectations to the hope for Zion. Here again, juxtaposition with *Star* is illuminating. In that work, Rosenzweig wrote of the Jewish people, "The land is in the deepest sense theirs only as a land of its longing – a holy land."[80] In his remarks on Halevi's poetry, the theme of longing and unattainability emerges once again, but the Holy Land is now tied explicitly to the Jewish scriptural and liturgical imagination and textual tradition. For instance, in his note on "In the Sanctuary," Rosenzweig writes, "The longing for Zion of the Jewish people has never been merely the longing of those who toil for rest, but always also the desire for a higher life from a debased one."[81] Zion, in other words, is the "higher form of life" that is longed for, yet unattainable. Yet if Zion is unrealizable as a worldly, geopolitical, national reality, it nonetheless can attain an altogether different yet visceral reality as it is conjured through words of the prayer book. There, the prophetic hope in Zion is alive. Rosenzweig writes that the liturgy of the Sabbath and holidays is recited at the time when "the prayers for earthly needs should be silent" (*die Bitten irdischer Bedürftigkeit schweigen sollen*). The liturgy for those days, which calls for God's grace to "return to Zion" and for the reestablishment of the Temple sacrifices, is the textual locus in which Zion truly comes to life. No less important, this liturgy is the temporal locus for the realization of Zion. We note here that Rosenzweig draws an opposition between Zion and the "earthly needs" of unhallowed daily life. It may thus be concluded that, for Rosenzweig, when these temporal needs are silenced – that is, when messianic time reigns – Zion emerges in full force.

[79] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen,* 205; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 260.
[80] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star*, 333/300.
[81] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen,* 207; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 261.

This other-worldly role for Zion stands in direct opposition to the view of cultural and political Zionists for whom the biblical and prophetic call to Zion was to be answered by creating a territory for the very earthly needs of real people. For Rosenzweig, a territorial home in Zion was neither, as it was for political Zionists like Herzl, a practical answer to the perennial problem of antisemitism (a topic Rosenzweig rarely broached)[82] nor, as for cultural Zionists like Aḥad Ha-am, a solution to the spiritual fragmentation of the Jewish people. It was, rather, the "miracle" promised by the prophets as the time, not place, of messianic fulfillment. Rosenzweig writes, "For miracles remain ever out of reach when a 'where' seeks them. They want to be conjured with a 'when.' "[83] Zion was, for Rosenzweig, just such a "miracle": conjured in time but not in space.

Given his reluctance to accord Zion a place in earthly space and historical time, the challenge before Rosenzweig was clear: how could he convincingly interpret the ardent expressions of longing for "Zion" that pervade Halevi's poetry? According to legend, Halevi's deep, personal yearning for the actual land associated with the biblical and prophetic writings led him to undertake a dangerous voyage to the Holy Land near the end of his life. In the famous legend of his last days, Halevi arrived in Jerusalem in his old age, only to be slain while beholding the gates of the city.

Historians have long agreed that Halevi died in Egypt, not at the gates of Jerusalem. But Rosenzweig, like many readers before him, was drawn to the legend nonetheless. In choosing to make it central to his interpretation of the poet and his end, Rosenzweig abandoned critical scholarship to follow instead a precedent set by the imagination of Jewish poets as diverse as Heinrich Heine and Micah Joseph Lebensohn, for whom Halevi's end claimed an integral place in their portrayals of him.[84] Rosenzweig could not resist the lure of the legend. Yet he had to neutralize the

[82] Rosenzweig, *Stern/Star,* 461/413–14. See also similar discussions of Christian antisemitism from 1916 in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig, *Judaism Despite Christianity: The Letters on Christianity and Judaism between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 113.

[83] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 177; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 249.

[84] Heinrich Heine, *Hebräische Melodien* (Munich: Hyperion Verlag, 1920); Micah Joseph Lebensohn, *Shire Bat Tsiyon* (Vilna: Y. Pirozshnikov, 1902).

claims of the "nationalists" for a Halevi made in the Zionist image, and in this endeavor he had to confront the pilgrim's longing for the actual place – the geographic, spatial Zion, rather than the merely imagined, temporalized Zion. To this end, Rosenzweig recast Halevi's ardent yearning for the earthly Zion into a longing for the end of both the poet's own personal history and the end of earthly time itself.

A revealing line in Rosenzweig's commentary suggests how he accomplished this feat. He writes, "The poet, as did many thousands in later centuries, takes the wish to die in Jerusalem with personal seriousness."[85] Rosenzweig chose his words with care: Halevi did not wish to *live* but rather to *die* in Jerusalem.[86] In a parallel to the messianic *telos* that awaits the Jewish people at the end of time, Rosenzweig overlays Zion with the poet's personal death and expectation of it.

The emphasis on death as the apex of the journey to the Holy Land pervades this section. In making his journey, Rosenzweig writes, Halevi "gives up on a world that is living to him" out of his "longing for the living God."[87] The "final goal" of his journey, in Rosenzweig's view, was "the grave in the holy earth."[88] In Rosenzweig's retelling, Halevi was determined to survive and persist in his life until he reached his destination, but, on his arrival, his death in the holy land occurred immediately. On a narrative level, Halevi's death *had* to occur, for Rosenzweig, upon beholding the vision of Jerusalem: the longing that gave the plot its dramatic tension was resolved and thus the protagonist was rendered superfluous.

This theme reaches its apex in the final comment on the last poem in the volume, where Rosenzweig underscores the necessity of the journey to Jerusalem as culminating in death, not life. His comment on the

[85] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 214; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 264.

[86] Indeed, as Scheindlin argues, "Halevi is the first Jew we know of in the Middle Ages who traveled to the Land of Israel not as a part of a religious community and not in order to join an existing religious community, but as an act of individual piety, with a view toward ending his days there" (Scheindlin, *Song of the Distant Dove,* 4).

[87] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 223; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 266.

[88] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 226; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 267. The phrase *Grab in der heiligen Erde* is repeated several times; see also Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 248; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 283.

poem entitled "Ode to Zion" (Halevi's famous "Tsiyon halo tishali," often included in the liturgy for Tisha beAv[89]) expresses this certitude, closing the volume with the following words:

> One is used to dismissing as a legend the story that Yehudah Halevi – at the goal of his pilgrimage, in view of the holy city – was slain by an Arab with this song on his lips. It is one, without a doubt. But there is still less doubt that the story could not have been much different. This poem must have accompanied the one who composed it into his hour of death. It does not leave room for anything else.[90]

Rosenzweig's book has no use for Halevi's biography until the very last page: the volume meets its end as Halevi meets his. But the final note resounds not only with death but also with Zion and the inextricable connection between them. Zion, like the messianic era it stands for, remains reachable only at the point of death or in death, an imagined future that always eludes the present while simultaneously orienting it. In Rosenzweig's view, "Zion," like the final poem composed in its honor, "does not leave room" for anything but the hour of death.

The culmination of *Hymns and Poems* in death had clear personal and existential resonance for Rosenzweig. He embarked on the project of translating the poems from Halevi's *dīwān* not long after he received a diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and was told he would not survive the year. In the face of this dire news, Rosenzweig dived into his work on Halevi with great enthusiasm. Although he lived another seven years with the progressively debilitating condition, a consciousness of imminent mortality suffuses the commentary on Halevi that Rosenzweig produced.[91]

It would be a gross simplification, however, to reduce Rosenzweig's insistence on death as the telos, and not merely the end, of life to his

[89] For a careful reading of this poem in the context of Halevi's own religious development, see Scheindlin, *Song of the Distant Dove,* 172–181.

[90] Rosenzweig, *Fünfundneunzig Hymnen*, 254–5; Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 286.

[91] As Zachary Braiterman has pointed out, thoughts of morbidity had long lured Rosenzweig and are evident in his early correspondence as well as in *Star* (Zachary Braiterman " 'Into Life'??! Franz Rosenzweig and the Figure of Death," *AJS Review* 23, no. 2 (1998). See also Braiterman's discussion of the Halevi book on this point in Chapter 3 of his *Shape of Revelation*.

confrontation with his own mortality. His solution – Zion as the permissible object of collective orientation but the impossible goal of political activity – forms its own "poetics of exile," in Sidra deKoven Ezrahi's phrase.[92] Ezrahi makes a convincing case that twentieth-century Jewish literature is marked by a deep ambivalence toward the fulfillment of the longing for the Holy Land. This ambivalence expresses itself through a "diasporic consciousness" that suffuses both pre- and postwar European Jewish literature. From Sholem Aleichem to Paul Celan, and even to Philip Roth, an orientation toward Zion, the Holy Land, and finally the State of Israel itself contends with a profound rejection of the possibility of ever finding a home in this world.

This is precisely the paradoxical impulse toward Zion that animates Rosenzweig's *Hymns and Poems*. His allegiance was to the Zion of song, lament, and supplication; to Zion as individual, communal, and cosmic *telos*. Though he had little interest in Zion*ism*, Rosenzweig profoundly engaged the Zion of the biblical and liturgical imagination.[93] He aimed to rekindle the diasporic meaning of Zion by insisting that only by longing for the Zion of the scriptural text could the truly [u]topian meaning of the place be fulfilled. Rosenzweig's interpretation and appropriation of Halevi thus marks this volume as the expression of a unique diaspora consciousness.

In the course of time, Rosenzweig softened his position on Zionism yet further. Calling himself a "non-Zionist," he neither opposed the creation of a cultural, political, and economic center in Palestine nor endorsed it. In a remarkable exchange of letters in 1927, Rosenzweig publicly criticized his interlocutor, Benno Jacob, for trivializing the Jewish hope in the Messiah and severing this hope completely from the activities of settlers in Palestine.[94] In the correspondence between

[92] Sidra deKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[93] A heated debate among Rosenzweig scholars on precisely this question was conducted on the listserve of the Textual Reasoning group in March 2004. I am grateful to those who contributed to the debate, especially Peter Gordon, Zachary Braiterman, and Dana Hollander, for furthering my thinking on the question of Rosenzweig's Zionism. As part of that discussion, Hollander suggested the possibility of differentiating between Zion and Zionism; my argument verifies the fruitfulness of that suggestion.

[94] May 23, 1927, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1150.

the two, subsequently published in *Der Jude* in 1928 as "Letters of a Non-Zionist to an Anti-Zionist," Rosenzweig declared that he did "not begrudge contemporary Palestine its 'factories and highways,' "[95] and he admitted that he was "impressed" by the closing of shops in Tel Aviv on the Sabbath.[96] The prophets, he declared, spoke about "an *earthly* Zion of the future. . . . The eternity that we Jews mean lies not in the indefinite future, but in the 'soon, in our days.' What comes only in eternity . . . comes not at all."[97] And though Rosenzweig could not himself believe in the imminence of this future, or in the building of a territorial land as a means to it, he greatly admired this belief in others and held that a messianic yet "earthly" Zion was the true meaning of the biblical promise. Even if one did not believe that this promise would be realized within one's lifetime, he held, it was nonetheless a duty to pray that it would arrive tomorrow. A letter to Jacob states this position unequivocally:

> I cannot say exactly how I think of the messianic future. But that is hardly counter-evidence. When it is time, the details will emerge. I am not naïve enough to be able to imagine the occurrence of peace among nations and groups without a radical recreation of human nature, one that is, viewed from today, incredible. *That I have a belief in such a future I owe to the* siddur [Sabbath prayerbook] *and* maḥzor [holiday prayerbook]. *I cannot expunge Zion from this belief.*[98]

The "Zion" section of the Halevi volume is Rosenzweig's most developed and nuanced elaboration of this declaration. It served as the site in which exilic consciousness and scriptural thinking met; together, they became the foundation for a new type of Jewish orientation in the world.

Rosenzweig identified scripture as the crucial element that had enabled Halevi to carve out a linguistic and religious identity for Jews within his own society. For Rosenzweig, the lesson was clear. Scriptural language held the key to both marginalization and redemption. Rosenzweig proposed to create a German that would be "foreign" to all of its

[95] May 17, 1927, in ibid., 2: 1145.
[96] May 23, 1927, in ibid., 2: 1149.
[97] May 17, 1927, in ibid., 2: 1145. Emphasis mine.
[98] May 17, 1927, in ibid. Emphasis mine.

speakers by "speaking Jewishly" and thus become the potential property of any and all of them.

Rosenzweig's most sympathetic readers responded to his effort to create a new Jewish language, drawn from the textual sources of antiquity, in German. In her laudatory review of *Sixty Hymns and Poems of Yehudah Halevi*, published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in October 1924, the journalist and essayist Margarete Susman argued that the success of the volume rested on Rosenzweig's overall conception of language. The experiment in "making the German foreign" was successful, she concluded: the poems "are German – totally and only German – but it is a German that we didn't know before," Susman wrote. For all the similarities to the experimental, high-modernist poetry of Stefan George – to which frequent comparisons were made by reviewers of the Halevi book and by Rosenzweig himself – Susman argued that Rosenzweig's work contained something that George's lacked: "the expression of an objectivity and breadth of the religious realm . . . which announces itself in ever new forms." This was accomplished, in her view, by virtue of the fact that the translation had "immediately created its own language." Susman continued:

> When [Rosenzweig] says in his *Star of Redemption*: "Language is truly the wedding-gift [*Morgengabe*] of God to humanity," it is so, as if he had wanted to bring out his conviction clearly in the translation of these songs. . . . We will feel in these powerful melodies both voices, the one of the "once" and that of now, clasped directly together. Visions of biblical power find their form in newly forged words.[99]

This, for Rosenzweig, was surely the highest praise that could have been bestowed on him.[100] Susman's enthusiastic response to the Halevi translation signaled the success, at least among like-minded readers, of his concept: the creation of a new German language, oriented toward the Hebrew of the Bible, which could provide the building blocks of a Jewish home that would exist on the page, in the word, in speech rather

[99] Margarete Susman, "Eine Übersetzung Jehuda Halevis," *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, October 25, 1924. The passage to which Susman refers is Rosenzweig, *Star*, 110.

[100] See Letter 963 (October 26, 1924) to Margarete Susman, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 659.

than in the world of seemingly divisive social practices. This new German linguistic realm would be, in addition, an *unheimlich* home, foreign to the wider German society and at the same time home to Jews for perhaps the first time since the advent of modernity in Germany.[101] Halevi's poetry provided the model for the endeavor that was paralleled in Rosenzweig's leadership of the Lehrhaus and that would ultimately continue in the translation of the Bible into German. It was an attempt to fashion a distinctive Jewish language out of the past in order to express both the longings for and the belonging to a home in exile.

[101] On *Unheimlichkeit* and the Jews, see Susan Shapiro, "The Uncanny Jew: A Brief History of an Image," *Judaism* 46, no. 1 (1997). On the significance of *Unheimlichkeit* in Rosenzweig's thought, see Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 90–94; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 214.

3

Bible Translation and the Shaping of German Identity

In the five years leading up to his death at the age of forty-two, Franz Rosenzweig devoted his waning energy to translating the Bible into German. It was a project for which, as he saw it, *The Star of Redemption*, *Hymns and Poems of Yehudah Halevi*, and his work at the Lehrhaus had been propaedeutic. Rosenzweig's perception of the Bible translation's importance explains his unabashed delight at its generating, as he wrote with glee, "offense" and "insult" unlike that of any other work he had produced.[1] His pride stemmed from another source as well. He believed he had undertaken a project that was vital to the regeneration of the language, culture, and society of Germany. He aimed to do nothing less than to demonstrate the hidden Hebraic foundation of German arts, letters, and thought. The translation of the Bible into German that resulted from this effort simultaneously posited the essential contribution of Judaism to German culture and challenged the political and social agenda of classical ethical monotheism with an insistence on the difference of the Jewish contribution to and place within German culture.

Since the Enlightenment, the politics of scripture had dovetailed with the politics of integration: Jewish translations and interpretations of their Bible in German culture were always undertaken with an awareness of

[1] Letter 1213 (September 2, 1928) to Richard Koch, in Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 2: 1196–97. The volumes corresponding to the five books of the Pentateuch were published individually beginning in 1925; the translation of the Pentateuch as a whole was published subsequently as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung* (Berlin: L. Schneider, 1930).

how the results might influence the debate about Jewish participation in the civil sphere.[2] It was a fundamentally ambivalent enterprise. Jews literally and figuratively translated the Hebrew Bible both in order to prove their prior claim on this text and to diminish the perception of their difference, or "otherness," within German society. The paradigmatic case, Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch, *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* (1780–1783), can be seen as both resisting and accommodating the rapidly changing circumstances of modernization; it was clearly animated by the twin efforts to aid German Jews in their ability to acculturate and to strengthen their knowledge of Torah.[3] Abraham Geiger's scholarly investigations into the biblical *Urschrift* were likewise informed by the desire to translate the message of the Jewish prophets into the language of ethical monotheism.[4] Subsequent Jewish translations – both actual translations of the Hebrew Bible and interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures for both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences – always trod a careful path between resistance to and desire for acculturation, between pride in being definitively "other" and the longing to be just like (non-Jewish) Germans.

As with all previous efforts to "translate," literally or metaphorically, the Hebrew scriptures to a German audience, the distinctly and explicitly political force behind Rosenzweig's interest in Bible translation depended on the perception of the text's unique status as a cultural possession shared by Christians and Jews. Rosenzweig appealed to a

[2] On the relationship between Jewish Bible translation and politics, see W. Gunther Plaut, *German-Jewish Bible Translations: Linguistic Theology as a Political Phenomenon* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1992); Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Abigail Gillman, "Between Religion and Culture: Mendelssohn, Buber, Rosenzweig, and the Enterprise of Biblical Translation," in *Biblical Translation in Context*, ed. Frederick Knobloch (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2002); and Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[3] Moses Mendelssohn, *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* (Berlin: George Friederich Starcke, 1783). As Seidman has observed, "The difference between . . . a view of Mendelssohn's project that foregrounds its strategic duplicity and one that emphasizes Mendelssohn's striving for transparency and equality marks a recurrent tension in Mendelssohn's biography and in the reception-history of his work" (Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 172).

[4] On Geiger's hermeneutics of biblical and rabbinic texts, see Ken Koltun-Fromm, Chapter 2 in *Abraham Geiger's Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

familiar rhetoric – the rhetoric of a common biblical heritage – in order to expose the ongoing asymmetries in the relationships between Christians and Jews in Germany. The conceit of a common textual patrimony, as Naomi Seidman has rightly noted, was widely invoked by Jews throughout the nineteenth century in an effort to further the cause of German-Jewish integration.[5] But Rosenzweig's unusual position within this essentially liberal terrain marks his own unique contribution to German-Jewish discourse and the maturation of a critique of liberalism from within. Rosenzweig himself embodied the very perceptual asymmetry that his polemic, which I describe in this chapter, both generated and aimed to overcome.

Rosenzweig's argument assumed that both Judaism and Christianity rely on the Bible and accord it a central role in their communal self-definition. But he gave an important twist to this common Enlightenment trope, which had been much touted by Jewish intellectuals and rabbis seeking an argument for inclusion in the imagined and then nascent German nation-state. For Rosenzweig, the Bible represented the locus of Jewish and Christian struggle with one another to win a privileged position vis-à-vis the text. The multiple valences of the Bible – its status not only as an emblem of potential harmony but of divergent, conflicting histories – comprise a critical element of Rosenzweig's essays on biblical translation. As he entered into his late period of writing, Rosenzweig used scripture as the vehicle not for an argument for greater integration, certainly, nor even primarily to make a case for Jewish difference, but to articulate a critique of German identity.

This cultural and political critique took shape as a theological and hermeneutic argument concerning the proper approach to the Bible. It was as if the encounter with the Hebrew Bible itself convinced Rosenzweig that the Jewish scriptures – claimed as specifically Hebraic – were the sole portal to revelation. No longer would the Hebrew Bible hold a limited, if critical, role in embodying a revelation independently conceived; no longer would revelation be identified with the absolutely contentless event, as Rosenzweig had formulated it in his youth. Rosenzweig's evolution as a religious thinker paralleled and informed his politics, and by the same token, his shifting concept of the relationship

[5] Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 160.

between revelation and scripture acquired a sharper edge in his later writings: Rosenzweig's reconceptualization of the Hebrew scriptures as the gateway to revelation provided the Archimedean point from which he would define a new politics of Jewish life within Germany.

Rosenzweig's forceful articulation of a Jewish linguistic-textual as well as physical presence in Germany through the vehicle of the Bible translation provides a measure of the distance he traveled from the radical theological convictions no less than from the tepid Judaism of his acculturated youth. Yet profound tensions linger within the work of the mature thinker. The most important of these was the difficulty of reconciling his universalist aspirations with an increasingly fierce Jewish particularism. The Bible translation provided Rosenzweig with an important locus for both the expression of this tension and the attempt to overcome it. He sought to collapse this divide, claiming that the Jewish Bible *was* the "real" – as well as the universal – Bible. The thin line Rosenzweig walked in making this argument can be all too easily overlooked; one is tempted to read Rosenzweig as either a "universalist" or as a "particularist," thus missing the crucial tie between these two elements of his project.[6] Rosenzweig's writing, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, indicates that he indeed recognized a bifurcation between the "Jewish" and the "real" (authentic, universal).[7] The divide between these two terms, for Rosenzweig, opened up a space for both acute disquiet and imagined, harmonious conjunction.

I shall argue in this chapter that Rosenzweig's encounter with the figure of Martin Luther in particular provided focus for his claim that *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* were not two halves of a spiritual, ethical, or political whole but terms of asymmetrical power and primacy that had

[6] Cf. Seidman: "The Buber-Rosenzweig Bible aimed to be not merely another *Jewish* Bible, which might aid the project of dividing German Christianity from the Jews and their 'Old Testament,' but rather a 'real' Bible that would ring out from beyond the Jewish-Christian divide" (ibid., 161).

[7] Paul Mendes-Flohr's thoughtful meditation on the "bifurcated soul of the German Jew" serves as a rebuke to the profound inadequacies of models of German-Jewish studies that prevailed for a number of decades. Mendes-Flohr regards Rosenzweig as a "representative man" for a much more nuanced model of German-Jewish identity. In this chapter, I refine this argument by showing that Rosenzweig does not simply take the stability of *Deutschtum* for granted, but rather seeks to redefine it in terms of Judaism. Cf. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

been wrongly equated, at least among liberal German Jews. Rosenzweig's creation of an innovative, provocative "Hebraic German" manifested this desire to correct and transvalue the Jewish within the German. Rosenzweig's hope that the Bible would resound in all its radical alterity yielded a set of exotic translational choices. But more than that, this hope also necessitated a set of critical hermeneutic claims about the nature of the biblical text that had long occupied a central place in German culture.[8] Rosenzweig argued that Christianity, represented metonymically by Martin Luther and his translation of the Bible, had wrongly claimed scripture as its own. A radical commitment not only to the Hebrew language itself but also to Jewish exegesis would demonstrate the misguided, derivative nature of the Christian claim and its apparent triumph in the German cultural sphere.

THE HEBREW BIBLE: A CHRISTIAN TEXT?

When the organized Jewish community of Berlin publicized its intent to ask various scholars to produce a new translation of the Bible, Rosenzweig wrote to Buber in early 1925, "As a German Jew, I regard a new official translation of the Bible not only as impossible but even as impermissible. I think only a revised (in some parts, much revised; in some parts, little) Jewish version of the Luther Bible is possible and allowed . . ."[9] The letter is remarkable because the two friends began to produce, within the year, a translation that had the intention of shocking its readership with its audacious difference from Luther's translation. Half a year later, Rosenzweig acknowledged Buber's primary

[8] On the significance of the translational choices of the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible, see Peter Gordon, "Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Translation, Ontology, and the Anxiety of Affiliation," *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 113–18; Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 135ff.

[9] Letter 992 (January 25, 1925) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1021. Regarding the Berlin Jewish community and the plan for a new translation, see the editors' note in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1021. Eventually, Lambert Schneider commissioned the project and Salman Schocken underwrote it when the costs proved too high for Schneider. See Martin Buber, "From the Beginnings of Our Bible Translation," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 177; Anthony David, *The Patron: A Life of Salman Schocken, 1877–1959* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 176–77.

role in articulating the principles that guided their translation: "The collaborative work has converted me from my initial reservations: I now believe the very principle of translation you discovered to be the right one."[10] But Rosenzweig, unlike Buber, viewed the shift from his initial reservations to the application of Buber's translational method as an awakening. He took to Buber's method with the zeal of the convert, and the loyal adherence to the Luther version that had shaped his earlier reading of the German Bible now gave way to a polemical rejection of Luther's translation – and Luther himself. Rosenzweig became not simply the project's "muse," as he often referred to himself, but a muse with a vendetta.

Rosenzweig's initial acceptance of the impossibility of producing anything but a Jewish version of Luther's Bible expressed more than a simple acknowledgment of the Luther translation as the authoritative German Bible; it also reflected a conviction that the German language and German civilization were profoundly Christian. Rosenzweig's perception, while idiosyncratic, was not unfounded: not only had Luther's translation been regarded for centuries as the standard German Bible, analogous to the English King James for English speakers[11]; it was credited with forging the common German language out of the multitudes of spoken vernaculars of the German-speaking peoples.[12] Rosenzweig gave this historical and linguistic observation a metaphysical

[10] Buber cites this letter from June 1925 in his introduction to the working papers on the Bible. Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften IV: Sprachdenken im Übersetzung. 2. Band. Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984, xvi). The boundaries between Buber's and Rosenzweig's thoughts vis-à-vis the Bible translation are hard to draw with certainty. In his correspondence, Rosenzweig often referred to himself as the "muse" rather than as an equal collaborator (see Letters 1012 [May 1925] and 1028 [June 29, 1925] to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1035, 48). But the letters and working papers also reveal the extent to which Rosenzweig had a critical veto power as well as authorial prowess vis-à-vis specific linguistic choices (see Rosenzweig, *Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*). My study focuses on Rosenzweig's essay "Scripture and Luther" and his own specific struggle to both engage and overcome the figure of Luther.

[11] On the debt the English language owes to the "Hebraisms" of the King James Bible, see David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, vol. II: *From 1700 to the Present Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 341. The King James Version relied heavily on William Tyndale's translation of the Bible a century before; on both translations' influence on the English language, see David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[12] Klaus Reichert, "'It Is Time': The Buber-Rosenzweig Translation in Context," in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 169.

valence: Luther's abiding presence in the standard translation and the role of the translation in creating the modern German language ensured that German would always bear an indelibly Christian cast.

This perception had oriented Rosenzweig's translational approach ever since his first translational attempt, *Der Tischdank* (Grace after Meals).[13] For some, this orientation was quite noticeable. One such perceptive reader was Gershom Scholem, who praised the attempt as "seminal," but noted the Christian reverberations within Rosenzweig's translation with disappointment:

What is fundamentally problematic and simply puzzling about the translation is its exceedingly systematic tendency toward the church and its terminology. In it, the highest, strongest, and the unambiguous in Judaism seem to be eliminated, and the truly moral, the *hatsnea lechet* [walking modestly][14] of our language has been disintegrated and has been transformed, for no reason, into the nuance-rich color and demonic ambiguity of the terminology of salvation. You have tried to salvage the utopian exactness and chastity of the Hebrew by placing it in a sphere in which it must, of total theological necessity, do without. Admittedly, it has not been proven that it is unattainable in German, but only in the language of the church . . . does it fail to be clearly expressed – because of the destructive affinity that many (though not all) religious expressions have with the language of the "Old Testament."[15]

For Scholem, the Hebrew language was inflected with the distinctive ethical and theological vision of the prophets, a vision that had disintegrated, in Rosenzweig's rendering, into the language of the Church.[16] Strikingly, Rosenzweig did not defend himself from this accusation; he acknowledged the "Christianness" of his translation of the grace after meals. Indeed, he argued that anything written in, or translated into, German would necessarily be or become Christian:

Only someone who is inwardly convinced of its impossibility can be a translator. Naturally I'm referring not to the impossibility of translation per se . . . . but to the impossibility of achieving the particular translation

[13] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Tischdank* (Berlin: Fritz Gurlitt, 1920).

[14] See Micah 6:8.

[15] See Scholem to Rosenzweig, March 7, 1921, in Itta Shedletzky, ed., *Gershom Scholem: Briefe, vol. I: 1914–1947* (München: C.H. Beck, 1994), 214–15.

[16] On Scholem's later views, see William Cutter, "Ghostly Hebrew, Ghastly Speech: Scholem to Rosenzweig, 1926," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990).

on which he works. The specific impossibility is in every case different. In my case its name is Luther. And not only Luther, for he is merely the point of passage in which the most ancient and most contemporary writers are briefly bound together, but, to be more exact, Nötker–Luther–Hölderlin. There is no such thing as a simple linguistic fact. The German language became Christian through these three names. He who translates into German must in one way or another translate into a Christian language.[17]

Rosenzweig was inclined to see German as a Christian language not because of any essential quality of its grammar or syntax but because of its literary and cultural history. The German produced by its greatest stylists and writers had been indelibly stamped by their Christianity, and in leaving their mark on the language, had indelibly impressed upon it the marks of Christian thought.[18]

By the second half of 1925, however, when the actual work of translation had gotten underway, a radical break from this position is amply evident. No longer convinced that German would always remain "Christian," Rosenzweig had begun to believe that the German language and its supposedly inherent Christianness could be challenged and overcome – not by "undoing" the Christian reverberations of previous translations but by superseding them with a new, Hebraic German. Engaged in the work of the translation, Rosenzweig started to regard German as inseparable from, and indeed derivative of, Judaism: standard German, which would always bear the marks of the Lutheran Bible upon it, had its roots far deeper than Luther. German, he soon began to argue, bore the imprint of the sacred Hebrew tongue.

[17] Letter 653 (March 10, 1921) to Gerhard Scholem, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 698–99. Letter translated in Anthony David Skinner, ed., *Gershom Scholem: A Life in Letters, 1914–1982* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 118. Labeo Nötker, also known as Teutonicus (tenth–eleventh century), is considered one of the first great German stylists. He translated Boethius's *Consolations of Philosophy* and Aristotle's *Categories* into German.

[18] This concept is articulated more explicitly in "Scripture and Luther," in which Rosenzweig discusses the founding role of the *Divine Comedy* for Italian and the Qur'an for Arabic. The distinction is that between the great literary works and translations that, for Rosenzweig, leave their mark forever upon this or that language, on the one hand, and the concept of "acts" or "events" as conferring significance on them, on the other. See Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936); Franz Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana, 1994).

This realization, Rosenzweig implied, was so overwhelmingly persuasive that it was forced upon him against his will: in a letter to Eugen Mayer, the lawyer and Lehrhaus lecturer, he wrote:

> . . . When I heard the plan for the new Berlin Community Translation, I thought quite actively about writing a major essay against it and demanding, instead, a Jewish Revised Luther Translation. It would be a wonderful essay, with plenty of malicious remarks against German Jews. Instead, now I myself have become the sinner.
>
> And it came about just as it happens when girls go wrong: imperceptibly, step by step, until the mishap has happened and then – though in this case after six months – the consequences arrive. For whether you believe it or not, this translation began as one of a revised version of Luther. Step by step – and at the beginning only reluctantly (me) and with heavy heart (Buber) – did we veer from the text of the Luther translation. It simply didn't work. . . . But until the end, before he wrote down his own version, Buber for the most part consulted the Luther at every point, making comparisons with other [versions] only afterward; as for me, I only did touch-up work using the Luther text, which lay next to the Hebrew one before me.[19]

Rosenzweig's metaphor suggests illicit desire, shame, and triumph all at once. After putting in six months working with Buber on the translation, Rosenzweig could no longer say that anything other than a "Jewish Luther Bible" – a translation that only made minor surface revisions of the standard German Bible – was impossible or "impermissible." The impermissible had become the imperative.

Even with their first volume, Buber and Rosenzweig had begun to produce a translation of the Bible that became renowned as radically different from Luther's standard German translation.[20] The pages of the translation, which were laid out to look more like free-verse poetry than

[19] Letter 1063 (December 30, 1925) to Eugen Mayer, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1073. Letter reprinted in *Almanach des Schocken Verlags auf das Jahr 5694* (1933/34), 118–119. Buber's recollection of the initial relationship to the Luther translation is found in Buber, "From the Beginnings of Our Bible Translation," 177.

[20] For considerations of the response to the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, see Lawrence Rosenwald, "On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig's Bible," *Prooftexts* 14, no. 2 (1994); Gordon, "Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Translation, Ontology, and the Anxiety of Affiliation"; Reichert, "'It Is Time'"; Martin Jay, "Politics of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible," New York: *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 21 (1976).

prose, bore no respect for the phrases that had long held resonance in the literary ear: the *ruaḥ elohim* that rushes over the waters in Genesis 1:2 had become *Braus Gottes* ["surge of God"], for Buber and Rosenzweig judged Luther's *Geist Gottes* ["spirit of God"] to be laden with Lutheran – not to mention Hegelian – overtones.[21] The *mizbeaḥ* upon which sacrifices were to be made had become the gory *Schlachtstatt* ["slaughter-site"], for Buber and Rosenzweig perceived the traditional translation, *Altar*, to be a bloodless euphemism.[22] Within weeks of the publication of *Im Anfang* ("In the Beginning"), the translation raised eyebrows and began to attract the ire, if not outright wrath, of cultural critics.

Buber and Rosenzweig's self-conscious, almost flamboyant quarrels with the Luther version soon became their translation's signature quality. Both the adoration heaped upon it by German Jewish youth groups and the contempt it invited from secular intellectuals stemmed from the bold novelty of the translation that claimed to be the recovered authentic voice of the original.[23] Both vitriol and praise centered largely on the

[21] Martin Buber, "People Today and the Jewish Bible," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 14–17. On the translation of *Geist*, see Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 265ff.

[22] Rosenzweig made much of the "gory" elements of the Levitical sacrifices, arguing that the simple, bold language of blood and slaughter yielded an "anti-aesthetic" that should be conveyed in the translation. Rudolf Stahl's notes made immediately after a 1927 conversation between himself and Rosenzweig testify to this conviction. Rosenzweig said to Stahl concerning Leviticus: "So you are saying that the content of the third book became even more foreign to you through the translation than it was before. That is exactly what we want. You should be disgusted! Your flesh should crawl! Only then will you come to the *Urtext*. When Luther writes 'altar' he obfuscates the sense of the word, which is only rightly described by the word 'slaughter-site' (Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1164.) And as Rosenzweig wrote to Eduard Strauss, "[Leviticus] reminds me of something my cousin in Munich said when she was six: I'm not pretty, but I'm smart! It is, on a basic level, the most pedagogical (or at least the most informative) book of the Bible. The Eastern Jews know well why they begin with it in *ḥeder*" [Letter 1127 (January 31, 1927) to Eduard Strauss, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1123].

[23] On the worshipful audience the translation found among the neo-Romantic Jewish youth and outdoors groups, see Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 47. On the negative reactions to the translation, see Jay, "Politics of Translation." Among the most prominent attacks on the translation was that penned by Siegfried Kracauer in a series of two articles titled "Die Bibel auf Deutsch" (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, April 27 and April 28, 1926); the review is translated as Siegfried Kracauer, "The Bible in German," in *The Mass Ornament*, ed. Thomas Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

difference between the B-R translation and the standard Luther Bible, which was boldest and most obviously oppositional on the level of word choice. The *Arbeitspapiere* indicate that Buber and Rosenzweig attempted to exaggerate their differences from Luther toward the end of the drafting process.[24] The response their translation generated testifies to their success in calculating how to appear to break most radically with the familiar, accepted German Bible in favor of something utterly different. Precisely these conspicuous and deliberately exaggerated differences between the B-R translation and Luther's testify to the central place Luther occupied in Rosenzweig's consciousness.

Rosenzweig neither simply appropriated nor flatly rejected Luther, but rather maintained a profoundly dialectical ambivalence toward him, a stance reflected in Rosenzweig's 1926 essay "Scripture and Luther" and all the more apparent from his unpublished correspondence. Rosenzweig in particular conceived of his and Buber's enterprise, paradoxically, as besting Luther by applying the great Reformer's hermeneutic principle to the Bible more rigorously than he himself had. The essay, originally published as a pamphlet by Lambert Schneider Verlag, takes a relatively moderate tone. It addresses directly the proverbial elephant in the room – the dominating presence of the Luther translation – for any reader of the new Buber-Rosenzweig translation. "Scripture and Luther" examines Luther's translational choices and his method in view of the "world-historical significance" it attained. It is Rosenzweig's apparently modest effort to explain the new translation's aim of extending, perhaps fulfilling, Luther's original vision of the Bible in German. But a closer look reveals that Rosenzweig aimed to indict Luther's limited theological vision, which had held such fateful consequences for the Jews. In truth, Rosenzweig aimed for nothing less than to supersede Luther, just as the New Testament, according to traditional Christian theology, had superseded the Old.

"Scripture and Luther" centers on the method Luther employed in his translational endeavor. Luther's method, Rosenzweig writes, was

[24] Maren Niehoff convincingly argues that Buber in particular stayed well within the accepted translational choices for many of the initial drafts. Only later, when Rosenzweig insisted that they come up with a "distinctly non-Christian approach," did they break from Luther and the more standard word choices. See Maren Ruth Niehoff, "The Buber-Rosenzweig Translation of the Bible within Jewish-German Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44, no. 2 (1993): 269–70.

informed by the primary goal of producing a clear, comprehensible German. But at certain times, Rosenzweig notes, Luther identified passages in which the translator should retain awkward but literal phrasings, passages in which one needed, as Luther put it, to "give the Hebrew some room" [*der hebräischen Sprache Raum zu lassen*].[25] The principle for identifying when such a need is pressing was that of the "analogy of faith," which, in Rosenzweig's words, was for Luther

> the unerring divining rod, which quivered wherever the Old Testament 'pushed [*trieb*] Christ.' Where for [Luther], the Christian, it was the living word of God – there and only there, but there necessarily, it had to be taken word for word, and translated in 'rigid' literalness. Elsewhere – and for Luther in the Old Testament 'elsewhere' was the chief part of the text – where, in the language of the wonderful passage in the preface to the Old Testament, the text was only a picture and pattern of governing and living, of 'how things happen when life is on the move,' the translator 'sends the Hebrew words packing, and speaks the meaning of them in the best German he can.'[26]

According to Rosenzweig, Luther was guided by the supersessionist assumption that the Old Testament only contained the "living word" where it prefigured Christ; Luther translated accordingly, conceding to the idiosyncrasies of the Hebrew language only at those select points. Rosenzweig glosses Luther's concept of "living word" as "revelatory," with potent results: "Luther's belief implies Luther's concept of a delimitable (because limited) religious content," Rosenzweig wrote.[27] The B-R translation, by contrast, would demonstrate a theological concept that is different because it had expanded the scope of religious meaning:

[25] Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 53; Franz Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 49.

[26] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 54; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," 50. What Rosenwald and Fox have translated as "practiced" I have translated with the more literal "pushed" (*trieb*). Elsewhere Luther speaks of "preaching" or "witnessing" Christ (*zeygen*). For Luther's approach to the Old Testament, see "On Translating: An Open Letter (1530)," and "Defense of the Translation of the Psalms (1531)," in Jaroslav Jan Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, eds., *Luther's Works*, American ed., vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955). See also "Preface to the Old Testament," in Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, vol. 35 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

[27] Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," 59.

its theology, according to Rosenzweig, held that the Bible contains *unlimited* religious content. This difference was to be made manifest by letting the Hebrew enjoy the full expanse of the text. As Rosenzweig wrote in explanation, "We do not know from what words teaching and comfort may come; we believe that the hidden springs of teaching and comfort may someday break through to us from every word of this book."[28] Luther, in Rosenzweig's view, applied his own principle of literal translation too narrowly. This conviction, for Rosenzweig, determined the need to give the Hebrew room at *every* point, and justified the choice to "retain" the Hebrew, by replicating it with rigid literality to the greatest extent possible. Ultimately, Rosenzweig shared Luther's sense of the connection between the hearing of the living word and the need for the Hebrew original to speak with its own cadences. For Luther, the original Hebrew style should trump the German literary ear only in those passages in which the prior question – whether the living spirit of revelation animated a given passage – had been considered. For Rosenzweig, this question had already been answered in the affirmative, at least as a possibility. The potentially revelatory word – like the potentially commanding deed that is the focus of "The Builders" – was Rosenzweig's concern; he would not restrict which words or passages might some day strike the reader as revelation.

But if Rosenzweig recognized a fundamental similarity between Luther's method and his own, the discomfort thus generated – perhaps by the narcissism of petty differences – is quite clearly exposed in his letters. In a letter to Margarete Susman, Rosenzweig wrote, "The theological formulation of the question, the 'What can be included in the Bible?' – in which the content is ultimately taken seriously, without which all philology remains unfruitful – Luther formulated this question as precisely as we did."[29] For Rosenzweig, the common principle to which he and Luther both adhered was the paradoxical axiom of the *Verstehen* tradition of hermeneutics: the reader must first anticipate the

[28] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften III: Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984), 761; Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 59.

[29] Letter 1232 (January 27, 1929) to Margarete Susman-von Bendemann, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1207.

Sache of a work before its details can be apprehended.[30] But the entirety of Rosenzweig's letter to Susman testifies to the deep ambivalence with which he accorded to Luther recognition as the discoverer of the most fundamental principle of biblical hermeneutics. Rosenzweig admits that his new translation shares the same theological departure point as Luther's, yet in the same breath, he rebels against the comparison. Writing in regard to a passage in II Samuel, the translation of which Susman had questioned, Rosenzweig wrote:

I must take back the scornful comment I made about Luther's translation of David's last address during my last visit to you.[31] [My own] result is, admittedly, much too Barth-Gogartenish – therefore much too Lutheran – to be Davidic. I hope that our theology will be more Davidic than Luther's. But the theological formulation of the question, the "What can be included in the Bible?" – in which the content is ultimately taken seriously, without which all philology remains unfruitful – Luther formulated this question as precisely as we did. *This I should have known, and not forgotten it while enjoying the pleasure of "getting back at the competition."*[32]

For Rosenzweig, Luther was not only a genius hermeneut but also, more importantly, "the competition." As Rosenzweig noted, he, like Luther, was guided first, by what is inside the text rather than what properly falls in the realm of commentary, and second, by the understanding that translational choices derive from, rather than construct, the text's essential theme.[33] But

[30] On the *Verstehen* tradition and its development, see Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969). Batnitzky focuses on Rosenzweig as a hermeneutic thinker and compares his thought (especially in *Star*) to the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (see especially Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 44–46).

[31] Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann suggest that the passage to which Rosenzweig referred was II Samuel 23:5. Luther had translated the passage literally: "Denn alles mein Heil und Tun ist, daß nichts wächst!" whereas Buber and Rosenzweig translated the passage with a textual conjecture that is very rare for them: "Ja, all meine Freiheit, alle Lust,/ Ja,/ ihm zu lasse ich sprießen" (Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1207).

[32] Letter 1232 (January 27, 1929) to Margarete Susman-von Bendemann, in ibid. Italics mine.

[33] Precisely this aspect of Luther's hermeneutic – that which in fact allowed Luther famously to call the Gospel of James a "gospel of straw" – was what captivated the Protestant theologian and New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and provided an authoritative precedent for his work on "demythologizing" the New Testament. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1951). See also the introduction to James McConkey Robinson and John B. Cobb, *The New Hermeneutic*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 33–34.

Rosenzweig hoped to reveal the inadequacies of reading the Bible with Luther and his contemporary incarnations, dialectical theologians such as Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten.[34] This competition, in Rosenzweig's eyes, concerned nothing less than the ownership of the Bible and the theological imprimatur it bestowed upon its rightful owner.

Rosenzweig stated as much in other letters as well. Writing to Joseph Wohlgemuth, head of the Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary in Breslau and publisher of the journal *Jeshurun*, Rosenzweig wrote that the audience he had in mind for his translation was not primarily the "expert and teacher" but rather "the many simple souls among Jews and Christians, who have lost access in the one case to the original and in the other to Luther."[35] His translation was to enable Jews and Christians alike to access the Bible anew, but the single Bible he produced was to speak with two voices at once. The translation was to move readers to the text by returning each community to a *different* "original": Jews were to be restored to the privileged Hebrew original; Christians, to its derivative, Luther.

The distinction is crucial. It sets up a dual but unequal restoration as the task of the Bible translation. The asymmetry of the two "originals" recalls the relationship between Christianity and Judaism that Rosenzweig had formulated two decades earlier, in his correspondence with his close confidant and friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and, shortly thereafter, in *The Star of Redemption*. "We [Jews] have crucified Christ and, believe me, would do it again every time," wrote Rosenzweig to Rosenstock in 1916, the man whose profound Christian faith had nearly convinced Rosenzweig to convert to Christianity only three years before. The very essence and meaning of being a Jew, for Rosenzweig, is a radical antinomianism: "God is our Father . . . and what need is

[34] Rosenzweig was aware of and interested in these theologians' publications, which he encountered in part through the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Coedited by Karl Barth, Friedrich Gogarten, and Eduard Thurneysen, *ZdZ* appeared in 1923 and featured, in many issues, selections from Luther's sermons in addition to articles by contemporary theologians. In addition, Rosenzweig's ideas played an important role "behind the scenes" among the editors of *Die Kreatur*, the short-lived journal coedited by Martin Buber, Joseph Wittig, and Victor von Weizsäcker (a Jew, a Catholic, and a Protestant).

[35] Letter 1074 (January 1926) to Josef Wohlgemuth, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1081. Translated in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (1936; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 198.

there for a third person between me and my father in heaven?"[36] *The Star of Redemption* affirmed his hierarchical and competitive understanding of the two traditions. Rosenzweig characterized Christianity's basic antagonism toward Judaism thus:

> The existence of the Jew constantly subjects Christianity to the idea that it is not attaining the goal, the truth, that it ever remains – on the way. That is the profoundest reason for the Christian hatred of the Jew . . . In the final analysis it is only self-hate . . .; it is hatred of one's own imperfection, one's own not-yet.[37]

The division of theological labor in *Star* reinforces the primacy of the Jewish "fire" fueling the eponymous star of redemption over and above Christianity, which draws its energy from this source and carries this redemption into the world. This "dual covenant" is anything but analogous; although Rosenzweig, in *Star*, favors Christianity with territory, history, and language, he argues that the Jewish people anticipate redemption without the spatial or temporal crutches upon which Christianity relies.[38]

Rosenzweig's letter to Wohlgemuth illustrates how this enduring concept of the disparate "covenants," or access to the divine, informed Rosenzweig's work on the Bible. Rosenzweig's conception of the Jew's "lost" access to the Hebrew Bible and the Christian's "lost" access to the Luther translation affirms the basic asymmetry of *Star*. Just as Rosenzweig had written two decades before, Jews remain with the original "Father," whereas Christians can only access him through Luther, the "Son." In the context of the translation, Rosenzweig intimated that

[36] Letter 307 (October, 1916), to Eugen Rosenstock, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*. Translated in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig, *Judaism Despite Christianity: The Letters on Christianity and Judaism between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969).

[37] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften II: Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 459; Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 413.

[38] Some readers have – incorrectly, in my view – characterized the "dual covenant" as equally elevating Judaism and Christianity in the task of achieving ultimate redemption. Cf. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better Than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 12; Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. Catherine Thiyani (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 21. I find Leora Batnitzky's reading, which attends to the tension that characterizes the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in *Star*, far more convincing; see Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 155–62.

Luther's translation is insufficient on its own, requiring the B-R translation to breathe the breath of life back into it. Jews have remained outside of history, with the pure text, and thus have a claim on the original, which constantly eludes the "nations"; Christians, by taking the Bible into history, distorted it.[39]

In his published writings, Rosenzweig generally downplayed what he believed to be the competition between Jews and Christians for control of the Hebrew Bible.[40] This is certainly true of "Scripture and Luther." But the sense of competition nonetheless persists, and it led Rosenzweig to posit a clever distinction between Luther's approach and his own:

> Our time has lost his [Luther's] notion of revelation; whether in greater clarity or in greater confusion, it seeks the revelation of what it considers worthy of belief in the whole range of what Luther, considering it merely a picture and pattern of life, had excluded from the firmly, visibly, and eternally circumscribed religious kernel of the Book.[41]

Rather than maligning Luther, Rosenzweig historicizes him. The struggle between Judaism and Christianity is over, he implies, and a new, non-specific "religious" hermeneutic that is neither Jewish nor Christian can blossom.

Rosenzweig's technique here has not gone unnoticed, but its meaning has not been adequately apprehended. For some readers, this passage indicates Rosenzweig's desire to herald a transnational, trans-religious age in which there will be neither Jew nor Greek (nor German). Lawrence Rosenwald has argued, " 'Our time,' not 'our people'; the translation is presented not as Jewish but as modern, not as sectarian but as universal."[42] Naomi Seidman affirms Rosenwald's observation.

[39] The presumption that Jews were estranged from the Hebrew drew upon the conceit that Jews "belonged" to Hebrew more than German. The widely shared trope among Weimar German Jewish intellectuals was *en vogue* as many of them were "discovering" a Jewish heritage that a century or more of modernization had successfully marginalized. As Seidman has noted, "[I]t was precisely when the distinctions between Germans and Jews had largely faded that these differences accumulated their greatest symbolic capital, if only among Jews" (Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 177).

[40] Only late in life did Rosenzweig articulate the details of a specifically Jewish approach to the Bible. See Franz Rosenzweig, "Zur Encyclopaedia Judaica," in *Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken (Gesammelte Schriften III)* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984).

[41] Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 752; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," 50.

[42] Rosenwald, "On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig's Bible," 145–46.

She argues that Rosenzweig treats Luther as a "respected precursor," and that "Rosenzweig spoke of the Bible as a long and continuous conversation between humanity and God, not distinguishing between Paul's and Augustine's role and his own."[43] Rosenzweig, in these readings, saw himself as merely the most recent reader of the Bible, graced by the arrival of an age in which the Bible could finally transcend all boundaries.

This reading fails to attend to the distinctly pejorative subtext that accompanies Rosenzweig's treatment of Luther, and especially to his delight in his ironic "supersession" of Luther and, by extension, all of Christianity. Rosenzweig seized upon Luther's hermeneutic insight precisely in order to dialectically engage the "father of the German language." Rosenzweig sought to *overcome* Luther rather than simply to *negate* him.[44] The Protestant reformer, widely (if symbolically) credited with overthrowing the Church and its obfuscating hold on the living word of God, would provide the essential tool with which he himself and the Christian domination of the Bible would be overthrown in turn. Rosenzweig hoped to show that the figural reading of the Old Testament, which he "translated" as the attempt to confine the power of the revelatory Hebrew word, would itself be consigned to the past.

Rosenzweig's move is an attempt to depose not only Luther as the last great reader of the Bible, but also, by extension, Christianity from its throne as arbiter of the meaning of the Bible. Rosenzweig cast himself as building on Luther's own presuppositions in order to supplant him, showing that Luther's approach ultimately yielded not a text that "drives forth Christ," but a text that is both fundamentally, intractably Jewish, and, only on this account, able to apprehend the universal revelation to which the Hebrew Bible testifies. The B-R Bible did not aim to be non-sectarian and universal *rather than* Jewish; it aimed to show that it was simultaneously Jewish *and* universal. The evidence for this is found both in Rosenzweig's relatively candid epistolary record and in his subtle repositioning of ancient and medieval Jewish exegesis

[43] Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 180, 185.

[44] Cf. Oona Eisenstadt, "Making Room for the Hebrew: Luther, Dialectics, and the Shoah," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 3 (2001): 551–75.

as the source for insight into the universal, transcendent meaning of the Bible.

ROSENZWEIG'S *SOLA SCRIPTURA*

Rosenzweig's critique of Luther paved the way for the introduction of a new model for reading scriptural text. Just as Luther had undertaken his translation with the aim of shaking off the centuries of Church interpretation, Rosenzweig undertook to pry the Bible loose from its historical, scientific, and institutional meanings, thus setting the original word of scripture free. Yet Rosenzweig's goal of liberating the word from the violations of Protestant Christianity, represented by Luther and his contemporary followers, maintained an uneasy tension with his simultaneous wish to exalt "Jewish" methods of reading the Bible, which came to represent the proper understanding of the Bible as wholly revelatory: on the one hand, Rosenzweig wished to clear all previous interpreters from the stage of biblical interpretation; on the other, he aimed to present Jewish sources as having succeeded at the task their Christian counterparts bungled. As I will argue in this section, this contradictory enterprise necessitated, first, the diminution of commentary as a genre and, second, Rosenzweig's representation of Jewish biblical hermeneutics not as a heterogeneous group of genres encompassing a broad range of exegetical works but rather as a unified and privileged stance toward the Bible. The rabbis, for Rosenzweig, were not "commentators" in the pejorative sense of the word, but gifted readers who attained supra-*wissenschaftlich*, universally applicable insight into the biblical text. Yet, paradoxically, the rabbis also help to define, in Rosenzweig's essays, the boundaries of a traditional Jewish reading practice, suggesting that a community that continually read the Bible in this privileged fashion already existed.

Rosenzweig felt strongly that his new translation should stand on its own on the page, unaccompanied by any commentary, neither the traditional commentaries nor those of his most favored interpreters.[45]

[45] Among the latter, perhaps the most important scholar for Rosenzweig was Benno Jacob. See Benno Jacob, *Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen* (Leipzig: Veit, 1905); Benno Jacob, *Die Thora Moses* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1913). On Benno Jacob's idea of Jewish biblical scholarship, see Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 220ff.

He attributed this conviction to his studies with Eduard Strauss, the chemist and autodidact in Jewish matters who, with no knowledge of Hebrew, taught courses on the Bible at the Lehrhaus.[46] In a letter to Strauss, Rosenzweig recalled:

> For me, the great thing about your Bible classes was that on account of them, I was placed before the pure text in its nakedness, without traditional garments, actually for the first time in my life. That had been something I had encountered, until that point, almost only with the Psalms and the Song of Songs; I shrunk from reading the Torah and the prophets otherwise than in connection with the Jewish centuries, and so I did not dare to place myself alone before the text and before the text alone. Your Bible classes first showed me that this is possible.[47]

Rosenzweig had been raised without any rigorous Jewish education to speak of, so it is virtually inconceivable that heretofore he believed that scripture must be read only through the lenses provided by traditional commentary. His incredible statement testifies, rather, to a fundamental fantasy of theological enlightenment since Augustine: that of discovering, as if for the first time, the naked word of the Bible. As Rosenzweig wrote to Buber, "Scripture is for all us Jews wrapped in so much 'oral teaching' that it always amazes us when we see it itself once again . . ."[48] Rosenzweig's powerful fantasy of glimpsing at last the "naked" text testifies to the deep pull he felt toward a direct confrontation with the Bible as well as to his almost ideological commitment to an approach that eschewed commentary.

This seemingly "Protestant" hermeneutic influenced the translation as it was to come to the reader. Peter Gordon has noted that Buber and Rosenzweig were insistent upon the aesthetics of their work; it was to be printed in a clear, modern type rather than the heavy-set traditional *Fraktur*, and was to include plenty of space in the margins. Accordingly, Rosenzweig saw it as essential not only to leave out traditional commentaries but also to dispense with any new commentary he might be tempted to provide. A letter to Rosenzweig's friend Victor von Weizsäcker

[46] Brenner, *Renaissance of Jewish Culture*, 83.
[47] Letter 1079 (February 17, 1926) to Eduard Strauss, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1085.
[48] Letter 1080 (February, 1926) to Martin Buber, in ibid., 2: 1086.

responded thus to the latter's query about whether the translation would include a commentary:

> . . . people have not gotten worked up about anything as much as they have about the Bible translation. I thought that I had already written many vexing things, but no one could care less about them, and when they paid any attention at all, it was in agreement with them. So too would it be with a commentary. It would be read only by those who would read it, and those who did would lay it to rest under a gravestone with the name of the author. In contrast, the new Bible excites the one who reads it and the one who doesn't; the latter it annoys even more. And this annoyance is not to be laid to rest with a personal name; – it must be allowed to live. Without commentary.[49]

Rosenzweig effaced his presence from the margins of the translation, and in doing so, established his authority all the more strongly over the text itself. Rosenzweig refused to attribute the furor and excitement that surrounded the printing of each new volume of the Pentateuch to his and Buber's aesthetic or translational choices. He was convinced, and sought to convince others, that the endless artistic and philological labors that each of them devoted to the translation became, in the final product, transparent, leaving the Hebrew original to shine through the German. The "Hebraicized" German, Rosenzweig hoped, would serve as a lens through which the true character of the Bible could at last be seen. Thus reactions to the translation were, for them, reactions to the Bible, and not to its translators. Any commentary would only exacerbate the tendency to obscure the translators' merely maieutic role.

Buber and Rosenzweig's characterization of their project as a recovery of the pure, timeless spirit of the Hebrew Bible testifies to the modernity of their approach.[50] As Gerald Bruns has argued, modern hermeneutics is characterized most of all by the effort to efface the history of interpretation that preceded it, a desire dramatized in the "symbolic moment of transition between ancient and modern hermeneutics": Martin Luther's request to the University of Wittenberg printer to produce a Psalter for his students "with wide margins

[49] Letter 1133 (April 6, 1927) to Viktor von Weizsäcker, in Ibid., 2: 1129.

[50] Peter Gordon has discussed the modernity – what he calls specifically the "archaic modernism" – of the translation in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, Chapter 5.

and lots of white space between the lines." Medieval Bibles usually featured the text surrounded by patristic commentaries much like a page of Talmud; the modernity of the text Luther had produced, by contrast, "consist[ed] precisely in the white space around the text. In a stroke, Luther wiped the Sacred page clean as if to begin the history of interpretation over again, this time to get it right."[51] Rosenzweig, too, wanted to clean off the face of the Bible and to erase its history.

In spite of Rosenzweig's disdain for all commentary, he nonetheless made occasional – and, I will argue, tactical – room for rabbinic voices in his essays. His essays on translation make use of rabbinic commentary, but in the process, radically transform the rabbis. The selective, careful references to rabbinic exegetical insights serve as the counterpoint to – and, simultaneously, as the fulfillment of – Luther in Rosenzweig's essays on translation. Though references to rabbinic traditions and insights in Rosenzweig's essays are few and far between, they consistently conform to certain characteristics that underscore the privileged status of the Jews in relation to the Bible. Rabbinic exegesis served to illustrate how Luther's method had already been correctly, thoroughly, applied: not by any other Christian reader but by the Jews.

Now, Rosenzweig knew that no traditional Jewish Bible had been complete without the accompaniment of medieval commentary, and his and Buber's working papers indicate that they consulted, if unsystematically and erratically, a wide range of traditional Jewish commentaries, including Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak, and others.[52] However, only rarely do the specific names of these figures or the collections of individual works appear: Rosenzweig cites Rashi by name twice, and Rashbam once, in his published essays. Nowhere does Rosenzweig suggest that "the rabbis" compose a group of thinkers extending over centuries, exhibiting competing claims and approaches. When the rabbis are mentioned in Rosenzweig's essays on scripture, they come to represent a single tradition unified by a coherent attitude

[51] Gerald L. Bruns, "*Scriptura sui isius interpres*: Luther, Modernity, and the Foundations of Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 139–40.

[52] See Rosenzweig, *Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*. See also Rosenzweig's broad sense of the scope and diversity of Jewish literature, as evidenced in Letter 952 (August 26, 1924) to Ernst Simon, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 986. Reichert observes the same point in Reichert, "'It Is Time,'" 181.

toward the Bible.[53] This conceit depended on a strategy of mystification that diminished the diversity and contentiousness of the history of Jewish commentary: Rosenzweig consistently treated "the rabbis" as a single unified group, stripping the individual exegetes of distinct identities or time periods. Moreover, Rosenzweig marginalized those principles of rabbinic exegesis, particularly those that present clear challenges to modern readers – such as the philological, didactic, and philosophical-scientific explanations of the biblical text – transforming these and other diverse modes of reading into a single sophisticated literary method.[54] This construction enabled Rosenzweig to portray the rabbis as constituting both a countertradition to a Lutheran hermeneutic and, paradoxically, as its fulfillment.

In Rosenzweig presentation, the rabbis' approach to scripture was uniquely suited to satisfy the demands of the "new age" because of its authentic insight into the meaning of scripture and the identification of the revelation within it. Representative of this strategy is Rosenzweig's consideration of the passage in which Jacob wrestles with an unnamed "man" in Genesis 32. He states: "Jacob's nocturnal wrestling with his unknown, unnamed antagonist is understood by the ancient Jewish

[53] Whether Rosenzweig's representation of the rabbis is attributable to strategy or to paucity of education remains an open question. Rosenzweig characterized his own youth as "thin" in matters of tradition (ritual and otherwise). His capacity for learning all manner of Jewish literature (not to mention other fields entirely) was prodigious, but his actual acquaintance with classical rabbinic texts appears to be uneven at best. In the long, reflective letter to Richard Koch discussed in Chapter 1, Rosenzweig writes that the "thin thread of tradition" that he experienced in his youth included only "Yom Kippur, the Passover seder, and bar mitzvah . . . [I only learned of the existence of the Sabbath evening as a student . . ." (Letter 1213 (September 2, 1928) to Richard Koch, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1197]. Rosenzweig's writings are peppered with allusions to rabbinic epithets and *aggadot*, but many of these stay within the well-worn terrain of frequently repeated maxims, stories, or mottoes: the Talmudic formulation *amar rachmana* ["God said"] (in "Die Bibelkritik," Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 748); his citation of the dictum "the Torah speaks the language of humanity" (in "Vom Geist der Hebräischen Sprache," Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 720); the reference to "Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it" (at the conclusion of "Weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung der Bibel," in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Shocken, 1936, 12). Niehoff makes a similar observation with respect to Buber (whose Jewish textual education was substantially better than Rosenzweig's) in Niehoff, "Buber-Rosenzweig Translation," 261.

[54] See Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

interpreters, reasonably yet also profoundly, as the decisive encounter between Jacob and the divine advocate of Esau."[55] Rosenzweig presents this reading as the single "traditional" interpretation, and does not name which exegete or exegetes offer it (it is Rashi quoting Bereshit Rabba; Sforno, Ḥizkuni, Radak, and Rashbam, on the contrary, state only that it was an angel and do not make the exegetical link to Esau here).[56] Rosenzweig then continues, "This reading is the *only* reading that makes sense of the struggle in the place where it is recounted, i.e., between Jacob's apprehension over the ensuing encounter with the brother he once so maliciously betrayed and the auspicious outcome of that encounter."[57] In other words, he suggests that where critical explanations (anthropological, philological) fail to account for the meaning of the passage in its context, traditional Jewish interpretation succeeds. Rosenzweig suggests that the reading of the "ancient Jewish interpreters" may require its own translation into modern idiom, but it nonetheless achieves a depth not attained – perhaps not attainable – by modern scholarship. Rosenzweig quickly disarms the wary reader: "We may feel, of course, that the ancient interpretation reads something into the text that is not there, perhaps as a rationalization," only to immediately defend the reading by making it comprehensible through an exaggeratedly literal translation: "But this can be shown not to be the case, precisely from the linking of the nocturnal struggle both to the apprehension that precedes and the solution that follows it," and therewith provides the reader with a proof that hinges on the repeated use of forms of the word "face" (*panim*, *p'nei*, *lifnei*, etc.).[58]

Rosenzweig presents Jewish traditional interpretations as, at their most basic level, *hermeneutic* claims. In so doing, he engages in a kind of demythologization not unlike that which the Protestant theologian

[55] Franz Rosenzweig, "The Secret of Biblical Narrative Form," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 137.

[56] On Genesis 32:25: "R. Hama bar R. Ḥanina said: It was the guardian prince [angel] of Esau. To this Jacob alluded when he said to him [Esau]: 'Forasmuch as I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me' [Gen. 33:10]" (*Bereshit Rabba*, 77:3); Rashi, *ad loc.*: "And our rabbis of blessed memory explained that he was the prince of Esau."

[57] Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 137. Italics mine.

[58] Ibid., 137–8.

Rudolf Bultmann had already begun to develop.[59] Bultmann argued, much more explicitly than Rosenzweig, that mythological readings of scripture require translation into terms other than those indigenous to them – namely, existential terms – in order for scripture to have any meaning for us whatsoever. The New Testament world, Bultmann argues, is replete not only with angels but also with demons who can and do possess the body; in that world, resurrection, apocalypse, and the entire "salvation occurrence" are represented as metaphysical realities. The sheer impossibility of appropriating this world picture as our own required, for Bultmann, demythologization:

> [C]ontemporary Christian proclamation is faced with the question whether, when it demands faith from men and women, it expects them to acknowledge [the] mythical world picture of the past. If this is impossible, it then has to face the question whether the New Testament proclamation has a truth that is independent of the mythical world picture, in which case it would be the task of theology to demythologize the Christian proclamation.[60]

Bultmann's method was not only negative: he sought to do more than demystify or dethrone the Bible. Rather, he employed a "hermeneutics of retrieval" to recover what he believed to be the religious meaning of the New Testament. Rosenzweig implicitly took a similar approach to rabbinic exegesis, albeit without Bultmann's theoretical coherence. Rosenzweig transformed the interpretation he has cited from a mythological speculation concerning the existence of angels into a hermeneutic insight compatible with the constraints put upon the modern reader of scripture. For Rosenzweig, the demythologized rabbis' world showed, in turn, the transhistorical truth within the Bible.

[59] Rosenzweig himself read Bultmann's writings; responding to Bultmann's essay, "What does it mean to speak of God" (1925), Rosenzweig wrote to Buber, "Yesterday I didn't get any further because of Bultmann's essay. Because I agreed with him, it gave me – as it usually happens – such a bad conscience that I used up my whole writing time writing a coda to the remarks on 'The Distant and Near One' [a poem in what became the Yehudah Halevi volume] (Letter 1045 (Summer 1925) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1059). See Rudolf Bultmann, "What Does It Mean to Speak of God? (1925)," in *Faith and Understanding*, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Harper, 1969).

[60] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

He "recovered" the latent meaning in the rabbis' commentary not through an existential hermeneutic but by means of what would today be called a literary reading.[61] Indeed, he could only reclaim the rabbinic tradition once he had identified its genius as literary or hermeneutic.

The (historical) community of Jewish readers, time and again, appears in Rosenzweig's essays as illustrative of how the Bible should properly be read, and his effort to valorize classical Jewish readers sometimes clashed with the principles that were more explicitly stated as the foundations of Buber and Rosenzweig's approach. Among these bedrock principles was a commitment to communicating and preserving the primarily oral aspect of scripture: Rosenzweig argued forcefully in his 1925 essay "Scripture and Word" that the translation sought to recover the oral, or aural, word of scripture and liberate it from the "fetters" of punctuation.[62] Thus one might have expected him to roundly condemn the Masoretes of the late antique period, who standardized and punctuated the biblical text, for violating an adherence to the fundamentally aural and oral nature of the Bible. Naomi Seidman points out that "the punctuation indicated by the Masoretic system, Rosenzweig argued, had never been intended as anything other than a guide from which commentators 'may and must in all modesty be permitted to diverge.' "[63] Nonetheless, Rosenzweig locates the Masoretes within a Jewish reading tradition that he aims to continue: in a letter to Rabbi Josef Carlbach in 1929, Rosenzweig wrote, "We diverged from the vowels and consonants of the Masoretic text only with the greatest reluctance, and on principle only where we thought a lot was to be gained."[64] Rosenzweig saw this choice to privilege the Masoretic text, even when faulty, as necessary to preserving midrashic wordplays and homiletic teachings based on it.[65]

[61] Cf. Shemaryahu Talmon, "Zur Bibelinterpretation von Franz Rosenzweig und Martin Buber," in *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik (Kassel: Karl Alber Freiburg, 1988), 275. I discuss Rosenzweig's "literary" approach in Chapter 4 and in Mara Benjamin, "The Tacit Agenda of a Literary Approach to the Bible," *Prooftexts* 27, no. 2 (2007).

[62] Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 42.

[63] Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 183.

[64] Letter to Rabbi Josef Carlbach, May 30, 1929, published originally in *Der Israelit*. Reprinted in Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 195–97.

[65] Franz Rosenzweig, "The Unity of the Bible: A Position Paper Vis-à-Vis Orthodoxy and Liberalism," in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 24.

The Masoretic text, for Rosenzweig, anchors the beginning of a hermeneutic trajectory he characterized as distinct from both German Lutheran hermeneutics and the scholarly enterprise. This supposedly coherent tradition of Jewish exegesis holds such promise for Rosenzweig because he attributed to it an integrity that was not to be undone by critical biblical scholarship. "[Even] if Wellhausen and all his theories were right, if the Samaritans really had a better text than the Masoretic one, our belief would not be affected at all," Rosenzweig wrote in an open letter to Rabbi Jacob Rosenheim.[66] Rosenzweig's declaration announced his allegiance to the received text that no "scholarly evidence" could dislodge. In doing so, Rosenzweig does not reject the legitimacy of *Wissenschaft*; indeed, he acknowledges the "accuracy" of those textual emendations yielded by scholarly Bible criticism, but argues that there is a value that goes beyond accuracy without contradicting it. This value is cast as that of the Jewish community's "organic" reading strategies, which Rosenzweig took pains to portray in the most favorable light possible.[67]

Rosenzweig's construction of this "organic" community of readers exemplifies what Michael Brenner, following Eric Hobsbawm, has referred to as the "invention of tradition" by German Jews during the Weimar period.[68] Few German Jews at the time were equipped with the skills to read the most basic Hebrew texts, let alone dig beneath their

[66] Letter to Rosenheim, April 21, 1927; published in *Der Morgen*, October, 1928. Reprinted as Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Einheit der Bibel: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Orthodoxie und Liberalismus," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936). Translated as "The Unity of the Bible: A Position Paper Vis-à-Vis Orthodoxy and Liberalism," in Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*.

[67] Anti-Jewish Christian polemics had long portrayed the rabbis of classical (and modern) Judaism as archaic at best and spiritually retarded by casuistry at worst. On Christian views of the rabbis and the Pharisees in nineteenth-century German scholarship, see Christian Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und Protestantische Theologie im Wilhelminischen Deutschland: Ein Schrei ins Leere?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 220, 321. Rosenzweig's effort was not the first to argue against these views of the rabbis; the effort of Abraham Geiger is particularly noteworthy in this regard. See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[68] See Brenner, *Renaissance of Jewish Culture*; Shulamit Volkov, "The Dynamics of Dissimilation," in *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985). Brenner borrows the term made famous in E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

surface by means of a sophisticated exegetical approach to them; few German Jews were interested in doing so. Rosenzweig, well aware of this situation from his own upbringing in an assimilated Jewish household, devoted considerable energies to the Lehrhaus and the various translation projects precisely to combat both widespread Jewish ignorance of and disinterest in the tradition. He wanted to awaken Jews to a longing for authentic Judaism they did not yet know they possessed: German Jews at this historical moment were hardly practitioners of any "organic Jewish reading strategy." Rosenzweig hoped to craft and disseminate such an approach as authentic.

The rabbis' successful application of Luther's approach forms the most inventive element in Rosenzweig's critical, subversive use of Luther: the Jewish tradition becomes that which exposes the authentic meaning of the text and establishes the legitimacy of the Jewish claim on the Hebrew Bible. Judaism, for Rosenzweig, claims its rightful place both as the spiritual mother of the modern German language and as the arbiter of the religious meaning of the Bible. Both of these assertions were calculated to challenge Protestant reign over the Bible and its simultaneous claim to Germany.

RECONFIGURING *DEUTSCHTUM*

If Rosenzweig intended to show that the principles of rabbinic exegesis accorded with a non-partisan reading of the text suited to the "new age," he could not do so unaware of the tension that inhered in this project. For even as he emptied out the specificity of the "Jewish" element in Jewish exegesis, Rosenzweig sought to retain the idea that a "Jewish" approach to scripture that could then be identified with a "universal" approach. He navigated this problem by suggesting a novel way to retain Jewish particularity even as he emphasized the catholicity of Jewish reading strategies: he portrayed the Bible itself as an "eternal book" that hovers above all earthly boundaries and transcends human epochs, and in doing so, suggested that the Bible could only be truly apprehended by those people unencumbered by history and land: the Jews.

This assertion sounded a distinctly belligerent note. He sought to pry the grasp of German language, culture, and identity loose from the Bible

and, in so doing, to make room for a multiplicity of voices within German. In "Scripture and Luther," Rosenzweig charges that Luther's translation had become colonized, or, as he wrote, "a national possession."[69] In contrast, he claims,

> . . . the voice of the Bible is not to be enclosed in any space – not in the inner sanctum of a church, not in the linguistic sanctum of a people, not in the circle of the heavenly images moving above a nation's sky. Rather this voice seeks again and again to resound from outside [*von draußen schallen*] – from beyond [*jenseits*] this church, this people, this heaven. It does not keep its sound from echoing in restricted spaces [*Räume*], but it wants itself to remain free.[70]

The Bible had been "colonized" at the price of radically altering its nature. Any nation – defined linguistically or territorially – that sees itself as officially sanctioned by the Bible cannot be said to understand its meaning.

This assertion, significantly, aligns the Bible with position of Jews in *Star*: neither has any true place in this world. While in *The Star of Redemption* it was the Jewish people who were the "eternal people," removed from space and time, the later writings present the Bible itself in this light. Rosenzweig's new translation sought to restore the Bible to its rightful "place" – the "utopia" that is, of course, "no place." This trope emphasizes the function of the Bible in providing an unearthly "home" for the Jews outside of space, an idea that surfaced in Rosenzweig's notes on Yehudah Halevi. Practically, this means that Rosenzweig envisioned Bible interpretation as a practice that removes one not only from ordinary time but also from national and religious particularities. For Rosenzweig, the Jews' paradoxical, privileged status derives from a more essential quality than their historic claim on the Hebrew Bible and its aural qualities: if the Bible is in fact a "nationless" book, then in a fundamental sense it can rightly be read only by a "nationless" people. In turn, the Bible guarantees the eternity of the people who continue to regard it as the "eternal life" that has been planted in their midst.[71] The only way to

[69] Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 759; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," 57.

[70] Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 758; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," 56.

[71] For Rosenzweig's use of this liturgical phrase, see Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften II: Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 372; Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 335.

prevent the Bible from becoming a "national possession" was to entrust its primary custodianship to that people that does not and cannot possess a nation.

Rosenzweig's conception of the particular claim of the Jewish people on the Bible was first developed and presented in journals read not only by Jewish thinkers but also by Christian theologians and secular intellectuals.[72] His appeals to the world of German letters – Goethe, Herder, others – speak not only to the literary context for the Bible he hoped to fortify but also to the audience he sought to reach. But Rosenzweig's *implicit* claim that the privileged interpreters of the Bible are the Jews, though subtle, is unmistakable within these essays. The new translation was to be free of the burden of Christian exegetical history, enabling it to restore the Bible to its privileged status as not merely "art" but as "morethanart" (*Mehralskunstwerk*).[73] Jewish exegesis had, for Rosenzweig, always remained unclouded by the specter of figural reading. It had, as well, always recognized the centrality of the Holy Tongue; it created an oral and aural tradition through which the cadences of the Bible as well as its written form were kept alive. If the Bible was to enjoy a resurrection in German culture, it could only do so, in Rosenzweig's view, if the Jews remained its first witnesses. And the German language could reach its full flowering only if it replenished itself by renewed contact with its Hebraic roots.

In his elegant meditation on the nature of German Jewish identity, Paul Mendes-Flohr suggested that the "soul of the German Jew" is best characterized as "bifurcated": multiple, fractured, dialectical. Mendes-Flohr, like many other recent scholars of German Jewry, have rightly challenged the shibboleth that the identity of the German Jews consisted solely in their devotion, at the eventual expense of their very lives, to liberal Enlightenment ideals and German *Kultur* (in contrast to "the Germans," who "cultivated an identity as a *Volksnation*").[74] The theme

[72] While a number of the essays on the Bible were first published in *Der Morgen*, a Jewish journal, some of them were first published in the *Die Kreatur*, which had been designed as a journal for Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic intellectuals. "Das Formgeheimnis der Biblischen Erzählungen" first appeared in *Kunstwart*, and "Die Bibel auf Deutsch" appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

[73] See Letter 1173 (September 2, 1927) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1171.

[74] Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity*, 16.

of German-Jewish identity, Mendes-Flohr proposed, is best captured in a concept of the "and" joining German Jews' identities: as Germans *and* Jews, they were to be "nurtured by two distinct spiritual sources." For Mendes-Flohr, Rosenzweig's work expressed this ideal in its most sophisticated, and most poignant, form.[75]

Rosenzweig's writings on the Bible offer a glimpse into a very different side of his thought. The concept of *Deutschtum* that Rosenzweig articulated in his later years was not analogous to *Judentum*, but was different in kind from it. Unlike that of his predecessors – in particular, unlike Hermann Cohen, his teacher – Rosenzweig's *Deutschtum* was a multivalent, complex, unstable category, and one that was inseparable from *Judentum*. Rosenzweig built on but ultimately transformed the work of his beloved teacher Hermann Cohen, who regarded Judaism as the source for all Western, and especially all German, ideals of ethical action and rational religion. Rosenzweig constructed Judaism as the source for any possibility of revelation and timeless relation to God, and set out to show that *Deutschtum* could only live up to itself after fully grappling with the debt owed to Judaism. The Hebrew Bible – and the Jewish tradition that has preserved the Hebrew word of the Bible – accomplished nothing other than the shaping of the German language and its highest cultural and even political achievements.[76]

For Rosenzweig, the successful appropriation of Luther's method and place in German culture had potentially revolutionary consequences:

> What will come of [the translation] now, I don't know. But under no circumstances will it be "the same thing" [as Luther's]. Hopefully not the opposite. I sometimes fear that the Germans will not tolerate this all-too un-Christian Bible, and that the translation might have the effect of an expulsion of the Bible from German culture – just what the new Marcionites are aiming for! – just as Luther stands as the conqueror of Germany by means of the Bible. But after seventy years, a re-entry [of the Bible into German culture] may follow after such a Babylonian exile [*Golus Bowel*],

[75] Ibid., 23, 89.

[76] See Rosenzweig, "The Hebrew Bible's Direct Influence of Goethe's Language," in Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 70–72. This essay, written a year after "Scripture and Luther," seeks to bring to light the influence of the Hebrew Bible on classical German that goes beyond what is directly attributable to Luther's translation.

and in any case, our concern is not the end but the beginning, and the beginnings. . . .[77]

At stake was nothing less than the future of both German and Jewish life. Rosenzweig's charge that the dialectical theologians were barely disguised Marcionites at once attacked Barth, who, in his view, had dissolved the bond between the Old and New Testaments by erecting the New Testament as the sole scripture,[78] and voiced Rosenzweig's apprehension that the dominant sphere would drive out rather than embrace the stubbornly Jewish Bible, represented by the B-R translation. The new, "all-too un-Christian" translation of the Bible might be banished from German culture for not being Christian enough. But in true dialectical fashion, Rosenzweig concluded that the "exile" might ultimately constitute a necessary step to Germany's flourishing. What the builders might now reject would ultimately be vindicated as German culture's chief cornerstone.

Before he began working in earnest on the translation of the Bible, Rosenzweig rested content with a concept of *Deutschtum* as different from and possibly exclusive of Judaism. But in the course of refashioning the German language, he came to believe that he was doing nothing other than calling German back to its Hebraic roots. In his ambivalent use of Luther and the Protestant tradition, Rosenzweig sought to decouple *Deutschtum* from Christianity, suggesting instead that the Jewish tradition is as able as or is better equipped than Christianity to realize the full potential of the German language. By making this shared text, the Bible in German, the centerpiece of his life's work, Rosenzweig hoped that Judaism and Christianity both might have a say in the ongoing struggle to possess and define *Deutschtum*.

[77] Letter 1063 (December 30, 1925) to Eugen Mayer, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1197. Rosenzweig's sense that Marcionite Gnosticism was enjoying a resurgence in early twentieth-century Germany was shared; see Jacob Taubes, "Das stählerne Gehäuse und der Exodus daraus oder: Ein Streit um Marcion, einst und jetzt," *Vom Kult zu Kultur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1996); Jacob Taubes, "The Iron Cage and the Exodus from It, or, a Dispute over Marcion, Then and Now," trans. Mara Benjamin, in *From Cult to Culture*, ed. Charlotte E. Fonrobert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

[78] Adolf von Harnack also accused Barth of exhibiting Marcionite tendencies in his "Open Letter" to Karl Barth. For a provocative essay on Maricionism as a cultural phenomenon in Weimar, see Jacob Taubes, ibid.

4

Toward a New Encounter with the Bible

In a 1928 review of the new German encyclopedia Judaica, Rosenzweig wrote, "The most common obstacle to the all-embracing unity [*Allgemeinsamkeit*] of Jewish spiritual undertakings is the position toward the Bible."[1] The neologism that Rosenzweig invented in the review, *Allgemeinsamkeit,* conveyed the importance of the Bible as the center of Jewish religious and communal life. It expressed his sense of the totality, unity, and commonality that, he held, had been hindered by the inadequacies of the reigning approaches to the foundational text of Judaism. To what could this situation be attributed? Rosenzweig minced no words. Modern Jewry had become accustomed, he argued, to viewing the Bible only through the lens of "Protestant *Wissenschaft,*" and had failed to develop critical scholarly tools indigenous to the Jewish tradition and its texts. "Protestant *Wissenschaft,*" Rosenzweig wrote, was "almost solely concerned, in a natural continuation of the old Christological effort to make everything Jewish merely a pre-history, . . . with preliminary questions regarding the history of the origin of our text."[2] Echoing Solomon Schechter's famous charge, Rosenzweig suggested that higher criticism was nothing other than the old wolf of Christian supersessionism dressed in the sheep's clothing of academic objectivity.[3]

[1] "Zur Encyclopedia Judaica," *Der Morgen* 4:3 (1928). Reprinted in Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Weik, Gesammelte Schriften III: Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984), 731–746.

[2] Ibid, 731–734.

[3] Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism – Higher Anti-Semitism," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 38.

I argued in Chapter 3 that Rosenzweig's writings on Martin Luther in particular reveal polemical elements that undergirded the Buber–Rosenzweig Bible translation. The rest of his essays on biblical translation continue this polemic. Rosenzweig cast his own approach to the Bible as simultaneously Jewish and more authentic, and thus able to apprehend the Bible's textual and spiritual integrity. It is impossible, in fact, to dissociate fully the polemical strain in Rosenzweig's mature writing on the Bible from his constructive hermeneutic endeavor. But the Bible translation project aimed to do much more than simply supplant the Luther translation and the "Christianized" reading of the Hebrew scriptures in German. In his last years, Rosenzweig tried to construct a new relationship toward the Bible for modern readers, and especially for Jews. Through it, he sought to create a viable and thriving Judaism that would be an antidote to what he perceived as the vacuous Judaism of his parents' generation. This new Judaism would necessarily require a novel approach to reading the Bible. For Rosenzweig – starting at least as early as his commentary on Yehudah Halevi's poetry – regarded the Bible as the focal point for Jewish identity and as the cornerstone of a Jewish communal and intellectual renaissance. The larger project he and Buber aimed to realize was that of placing modern, historically and critically sensitive readers into a direct "encounter" with the Hebrew Bible, and from this encounter, they believed, a new *Allgemeinsamkeit* would emerge.

To this end, Rosenzweig in particular argued for the necessity of a *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft*, a concept that had been proposed by the Jewish Bible scholar Benno Jacob (1862–1945) beginning at the turn of the twentieth century.[4] For Rosenzweig, as for Jacob, Jewish Bible scholarship would proceed from an explicit contrast with what Rosenzweig claimed was commonly accepted as the only legitimate form of biblical criticism. Jacob, who devoted substantial effort to exposing anti-Jewish bias in Protestant Bible scholarship, argued for an alternative biblical scholarship that fully admitted the historical

[4] See, among other works, Benno Jacob, "Unsere Bibel in Wissenschaft und Unterricht. Vortrag gehalten in der wissenschaftlichten Vereinigung jüdischer Schulmänner zu Berlin," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 62, no. 43 (1898). On Benno Jacob's concept of *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft* and the development of his theory starting in 1898, see Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 220–30.

authorship of the Hebrew Bible but did not, on that account, denigrate Judaism. Rosenzweig regarded their task as that of translating the work of scholars – in large part, of Jewish scholars like Jacob – into material that could reorient Jewish readership and its relationship to Judaism as a whole.[5]

Building on Jacob's pioneering work in his 1928 review essay, Rosenzweig argued that the task of *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft* would be

> . . . to ask about the intention of the texts that lie before us. For the text as it is before us has an intention; it is not merely – as Protestant scholarship would be concerned with – written; it also wants to be *read* and *understood*. Understood in the sense of the final redaction, not in the sense of individual bits that are to be peeled from the sources. This new [Jewish] Bible-scholarship does not turn its eyes away from any problem raised by critical modernity, but rather presents all problems that were already raised in the past as well as the ones that are only visible to the new Bible scholarship from the perspective of the last redactor (or, said otherwise, the first reader). By doing so, it will then find again entirely for itself the connection to the Jewish biblical science [*jüdische Bibelwissenschaft*] of the past, which, even if it was guided by an unconscious dogmatism, proceeds from a similar point of view.[6]

The essays and working papers that Rosenzweig wrote between 1925 and 1929 on Bible translation – collected and published in 1936 as *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* – represent the implementation of this proposal. Taken together, the essays allow us to reconstruct the philosophical, theological, and social commitments that guided the remarkable Bible translation.[7]

In this chapter, I will argue that Rosenzweig's approach to the Bible reveals the extent to which his mature writings accommodated a set of post-Enlightenment limitations on religious thought. These essays

[5] See Benno Jacob, *Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen* (Leipzig: Veit, 1905); Benno Jacob, *Die Thora Moses* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1913).

[6] Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*, 734.

[7] Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Shocken, 1936). These essays were translated into English and published as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (1936; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). I have chosen in many cases to follow Rosenwald and Fox's translation when citing essays published in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, but have noted where my translation differs from theirs. All translations of other materials are my own.

thus offer a marked contrast to his earlier tendency, exhibited most of all in *The Star of Redemption,* to present revelation as an opposing force to "philosophy." In particular, Rosenzweig's discussion of the generic characteristics of the Hebrew Bible and the way the text achieves its revelatory potential provides a measure of how the intervening decade of Jewish study, teaching, and activity had translated into a significant intellectual distance from this early work. In the essays and working papers he produced while at work on the Bible translation, Rosenzweig no longer invoked the Bible as an alternative to "philosophy," a status it dubiously attained by containing the unmediated voice of God. For the mature Rosenzweig, the Bible had the potential to reorient human communities, but was not imagined as absolutely outside of or "other" to them. The possibilities for Jewish communal rejuvenation that Rosenzweig envisioned, and the relationship of these communities to the Hebrew Bible, were much more explicitly circumscribed by his accommodation to the social and philosophical conditions of modern civil society. In spite of what seem to be some deliberately enigmatic formulations in the essays, this shift ultimately makes Rosenzweig's last endeavor more intellectually compelling than his earlier works. Moreover, it renders these late essays, rather than Rosenzweig's better-known opus, *Star*, a more useful resource for contemporary reflection on revelation and its scriptural aspect.

To make this case, I present in this chapter an analysis of Rosenzweig's proposal for reading the Bible. This proposal, I argue, is implicit in his essays on biblical translation, even though he and Buber never explicitly outlined their hermeneutic assumptions. But the guiding principles, translational techniques, and assumptions Rosenzweig brought to his work served not merely as a guide for proper translation; they also served as well to reveal a theological and hermeneutic stance toward the text. Seemingly trivial matters of phrasing, appearance, and word choice that these techniques touched were highly charged because of the profound tensions – aesthetic, political, symbolic – that lent the project its monumental ambitions. The translational techniques that I analyze in this chapter included the identification and translation of "theme words" (*Leitworte*), the text's visual appearance, and the divisions of the text into small units on the page (*Kolometrie*). I also

examine Rosenzweig's assumption of and commitment to a multivalent "unity," from the *Allgemeinsamkeit* to which Rosenzweig referred in his 1928 essay to the literary and theological unity he perceived in the biblical text, how it guided particular instantiations of biblical translation, and the confusion it generated – and revealed – between metaphysical and literary unity. Finally, I consider Rosenzweig's justification for the unique religious significance of the Bible, even as he embraced a fundamentally sociological argument for the Bible's import within the human community.

Rosenzweig's work in translating the Bible – as he himself admitted – was deeply indebted to Martin Buber, whose more advanced philological skills enabled him to better appreciate the linguistic style of the Bible.[8] Buber brought to the project a far greater command of the Hebrew language than Rosenzweig. Moreover, Buber's early training in hermeneutics influenced his long-standing regard for the import of religious texts in helping the individual achieve *Erlebnis*, the experience of mystical unity or openness to cosmic presence.[9] But Rosenzweig's writings, as much as they bear the marks of Buber's philosophical commitment to organic unity, have their own unique characteristics.

[8] Letter 1012 (May 1925) to Martin Buber, in Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 2: 1034–35. Letter 1028 (June 29, 1925) to Martin Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2: 1047; Martin Buber, "From the Beginnings of Our Bible Translation," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 178.

[9] Buber's focus on *Erlebnis* in his hermeneutic method, especially in his early rendering of Hasidic legends, owes a well-documented debt to his studies with Wilhelm Dilthey. On Buber's training in social philosophy and his application of this training to his textual hermeneutics, see Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Michael Fishbane, "The Biblical Dialogue of Martin Buber," in *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). On more general issues surrounding Buber's reading of Jewish texts, see discussions in Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Orientalism, the Ostjuden, and Jewish Self-Affirmation," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ed. J. Frankel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber's Reception among the Jews," *Modern Judaism* 6, no. 2 (1986); Lawrence J. Silberstein, "Martin Buber: The Social Paradigm in Modern Jewish Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLIX, no. 2 (1981).

In particular, Rosenzweig's essays frequently give Buber's philological contribution to the Bible translation a more theoretical and theological cast. Rosenzweig's essays are preoccupied in a way Buber's are not with questions of divine revelation, which recur constantly if implicitly in his discussion of translational matters.

Rosenzweig's essays arise out of a commitment to a *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft* that, for him, would both draw upon critical Bible scholarship and expose what he believed were its blind spots. Rosenzweig claimed that *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft* constituted merely the rediscovery and systematic application of an indigenous, Jewish biblical criticism. These latter elements are critical to an appreciation of the translation itself, Rosenzweig's thought in his last years, and the problems and possibilities of reclaiming scripture for contemporary readers.

THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

The conviction that the Bible was, and should be treated as, a unity served as a basic orienting principle of Buber and Rosenzweig's biblical hermeneutics. Buber in particular had been influenced by his studies with Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel, developing a multifaceted understanding of the interaction between religious and social unity in the formative period of his intellectual development.[10] Rosenzweig's early skepticism toward Buber's mysticism notwithstanding, the concept of unity that Buber brought to the table in their translational project had a profound influence on the Bible that the two friends and collaborators ultimately produced.

But the parameters of this "unity," as applied to the Bible, were ill-defined and vague. "Unity" indicated, by turns, stylistic, substantive, and thematic "spiritual" unity. None of these divergent meanings was fully extricated from the others or explained in its own right. Most charitably understood, Rosenzweig's concept resembles the idea, associated especially with the work of Brevard Childs, of *canonical* unity, the result of centuries of veneration, rereading,

[10] Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue*, 42–47.

and institutionalization.[11] Rosenzweig held that the Bible, the fateful text around which all spiritual life in the West, and especially in Judaism, had revolved for centuries had been rendered a unified, coherent, and meaningful text by its readers. This conviction, however, was never articulated quite so clearly; instead, Buber and Rosenzweig's essays speak most explicitly of *literary* and *theological* unity. They made strong claims for treating the Hebrew Bible as a complex but integrated and organic entity based on their identification of certain literary elements of the Bible as characteristic of the Bible as a whole. In making these claims, they drew almost exclusively on the narrative sections of the Pentateuch, ignoring the wide variety of genres and styles elsewhere in the Bible. The "unity of the Bible" therefore performed an important, if tacit, theological role masked as literary analysis.

Rosenzweig's most oft-cited remark on the importance of treating the Bible as a unity is a 1927 letter to the Orthodox rabbi Jacob Rosenheim, leader of the Frankfurt Separate Orthodoxy, director of the Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft, and the publisher of the weekly journal *Israelit*. In justifying his and Buber's decision to confine their investigations to the redacted text, Rosenzweig wrote:

> . . . On the basis of our belief in the holiness and the exceptionality of the text, we do not draw any conclusions as to the literary process by which it arose or the philological value of the text as it has come to us . . . We are translating the Torah as one book. Likewise, for us, it is the work of a single spirit [*das Werk eines Geistes*].[12] We don't know who it was; we cannot believe that it was Moses. Between ourselves, we call him by the

[11] For a conservative statement of the idea of Bible as canon, see Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994); Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). A more critical concept of Bible as canon can be found in James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[12] The translation of *Geist* as "mind" (see Rosenwald and Fox) is not inappropriate, but Buber and Rosenzweig's theology (and indeed this passage itself) suggests that "spirit" or even the inelegant "intelligence" would more accurately capture their meaning. It is hardly imaginable that Rosenzweig conceived of the "author" of the Bible as a single individual, as "mind" implies. Rather, R, whether it stands for Redactor or Rabbenu, serves as a shorthand for the process thanks to which the text as a whole owes its coherence for the reader, a process owing as much to the reader as to the editor of the text.

abbreviation that critical scholarship uses to signify the redactor that it has finally accepted: R. But we expand this R not to *Redaktor*, but to *Rabbenu* [''our teacher,'' viz., Moses]. For whoever he was and whatever he propounded, he is our teacher and his theology is our teaching.[13]

Rosenzweig argued that it was legitimate to bracket the issues of ''why'' and ''to whom'' the coherence of the Bible can be attributed; the simple fact of its coherence could and should be taken as a starting point. Rosenzweig likely chose the term ''Torah'' in order to appeal to Rosenheim's conservativism: ''Torah,'' unlike ''Bible'' or ''Pentateuch,'' is indeterminate, as it can refer to the Decalogue, the Pentateuch, the Hebrew Bible, and even the vast rabbinic corpus of explications of the Bible, each term including and expanding upon the ones before.[14] ''Torah'' thus indicates an ever-widening sense of the single revelation, such that the later redactor of scripture could claim to share in, rather than diminish, the text's revelatory quality.

[13] Franz Rosenzweig, ''Die Einheit der Bibel: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Orthodoxie und Liberalismus,'' in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 47; Franz Rosenzweig, ''The Unity of the Bible: A Position Paper Vis-à-Vis Orthodoxy and Liberalism,'' in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 23. See also Buber's comment on this remark, in Buber and Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, 179. Buber's version of this statement, from a 1935 essay, is: ''The Bible seeks to be read as one book, so that no one of its parts remains self-contained; rather every part is held open to every other. The Bible seeks to be present as one book for its readers so intensely that in reading or reciting an important passage they recall all the passages connected to it, and in particular those connected to it by linguistic affinity . . . so intensely that all these passages illuminate and explain one another, that they cohere into a unity of meaning [*Sinneinheit*], into a theological doctrine [*Theologumenon*] . . . immanent in the text and emerging from its linguistic connections and correspondences'' [''Zur Verdeutschung der Preisungen,'' in Buber and Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, 169; Martin Buber, ''On Translating the Praisings,'' in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 91].

[14] On this principle of the ever-expanding concept of ''Torah,'' a classic essay is Gershom Scholem, ''Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism,'' in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971). Jacob Rosenheim had long gone on record stating his vociferous opposition to any bifurcation of the ''written Torah'' and the ''oral Torah''; see Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 279 fn 189. For a contemporary discussion of the way the term ''Torah'' may be useful in addressing the problem of a unified biblical text, see Benjamin Sommer, ''Unity and Plurality in Jewish Canons: The Case of the Oral and Written Torahs,'' in *One Scripture or Many? Perspectives Historical, Theological, and Philosophical*, eds. Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Rosenzweig's concept of the unity of the Bible and his sense of the work that this concept could perform emerged out of a broadly shared sense of the spiritual poverty engendered by a source-critical approach to the Bible. The idea of a unified theological doctrine that emerged from the text gained currency in theology and biblical studies in the 1920s and 1930s. Only a few years after Buber and Rosenzweig's essays on biblical translation appeared, Gerhard von Rad's influential *Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch* (1938) sought to turn Bible scholarship away from the "profoundly disintegrating effect" of Hexateuchal criticism and toward the final form of the text as it had been redacted.[15] Frustrated with the seeming reductionism of Wellhausen and his followers and the form criticism pioneered by Hermann Gunkel, von Rad led the way toward the search for the unity of the Bible on the basis of content by identifying the "creed" or "summary of the principal facts of God's redemptive activity" that lay beneath and unified the compilation of texts that was the Hexateuch.[16] Buber and Rosenzweig's appeal to the unity of scripture as read, on the one hand, and von Rad's work, on the other, bear a striking affinity to each other, testifying to the appeal of a synthetic, unifying approach to the Bible to Bible scholars in the 1920s and 1930s of various religious stripes, all of whom had a negative reaction to what was perceived to be a lack of holism in source-criticism.

The concept of a unified Hebrew Bible had special import for Jewish scholars. From the beginnings of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in the 1820s, scholarship of Jewish sources had focused on post-biblical literature.[17] These early scholars of "Jewish studies" argued that the purification of Judaism demanded the relentless critique of rabbinic and liturgical literature. The Bible, however, stood largely outside of the

[15] von Rad cited in Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 63.

[16] von Rad identified Deuteronomy 26:5–9 as the locus of this creed, citing its alliterative qualities as evidence of its antiquity (ibid., 64). On Gunkel's position, see Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 237–39.

[17] The programmatic statement of this movement outlined the priorities of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement, with specific mention of the importance of bringing a critical eye to post-biblical literature. See especially Leopold Zunz, "Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: L. Gerschel, 1875). On the movement as a whole, see Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994).

scholarly agenda of Leopold Zunz, Eduard Gans, and others in their circle. But by the turn of the century, as Christian Wiese has argued, this neglect of the Bible in Jewish scholarly circles – especially when juxtaposed to the torrent of scholarship by Protestant academics – suggested something quite sinister. Jewish scholars such as Max Dienemann, David Hoffmann, and Benno Jacob chafed at what they perceived as Protestant scholars' proprietary claim on the critical study of the Hebrew Bible. These Jewish scholars charged that the Jewish scholarly neglect of the Torah – a term they deliberately invoked to distinguish themselves from Christian academics – had yielded deleterious results for Jewish intellectual and religious life. They argued that the anti-Jewish element in mainstream Bible research thwarted the possibility of objective research; they viewed the development of a non-reductionistic approach to the Hebrew Bible, *contra* Wellhausen, as a research priority.

This consensus was only strengthened in the wake of the "Bible-Babel controversy," which erupted in the wake of Franz Delitzsch's lectures on the role of Mesopotamian ethics in shaping biblical monotheism (1902–1904). Delitzsch demoted the special character of biblical ethics by placing biblical literature firmly in its Near Eastern context. Even those Protestant scholars who rejected Delitzsch's conclusion, arguing for the special character of the biblical ethos, viewed post-biblical Judaism as a betrayal of the biblical heritage.[18] The most vocal Jewish biblical scholars, and in particular Benno Jacob, stressed the continuity of the Bible and post-biblical Judaism. An emphasis on the internal coherence of the Hebrew Bible was deemed necessary to buttress this position.

These events had shaped the climate in which Rosenzweig encountered Jewish thought and biblical study in Berlin. His late writings show his appropriation of what had, by then, become a distinctive and coherent "Jewish" position for his own theological purposes. Rosenzweig's playful remark to Rosenheim about the identity of 'R', if pressed, remains remarkably vague; indeed, it is typical of Rosenzweig's tendency to detour around, rather than address, the questions raised by historical inquiry. His argument illustrates the tensions that inhere in this adaptation of scholarship for metascholarly ends, for Rosenzweig

[18] See in particular Hermann Gunkel's position, discussed in Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 237–8.

was aware of the potentially destructive power of historicism to become the final arbiter of religious meaning. Yet he could not but also acknowledge, if subtly, the validity of source criticism for understanding the Bible, indicated by his unwillingness to dismiss higher criticism entirely. His gestures toward the valuable contributions of higher criticism coexist in tension with this deep suspicion of "old *Wissenschaft*" and his opposition to fully integrating it with a new approach.

Rosenzweig's critique of source-criticism added a unique element to the Jewish scholarly consensus as well: a vindication of pre-modern Jewish exegesis. Rosenzweig claimed that his *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft* made clear a unity in the text that had long been apprehended by the ancient and medieval Jewish commentators. In the review of the Encyclopedia Judaica, he wrote:

> This new Bible-scholarship does not turn its eyes away from any problem raised by critical modernity, but rather presents all problems that were already raised in the past as well as the ones that are only visible to the new Bible scholarship from the perspective of the last redactor (or, said otherwise, the first reader). By doing so, it will then find again entirely for itself the connection to the Jewish biblical science [*Wissenschaft*] of the past, which, *even if it was guided by an unconscious dogmatism, proceeds from a similar point of view*.[19]

Rosenzweig's invocation of the traditional Jewish term for the author of the Pentateuch, [*Moshe*] *Rabbenu*, implied that his approach toward the Bible was coherent with and a simple continuation of "traditional" attitudes (be they "rabbinic" or simply "Jewish") toward the text.

Positing such a claim necessitated a radical recasting of ancient and medieval Jewish exegetical practices. Traditional Jewish biblical commentary, after all, begins from a presumption of theological and intentional, but not literary, unity. Indeed, perceived textual "abnormalities," apparent contradictions or errors, gave rise to a fruitful tension as the assumption of the biblical text's theological perfection needed to be upheld in classical Jewish exegesis. Wildly creative (mis)readings flourished as commentators suppressed or negated the possibility of true error.[20] The effort

[19] "Zur Encyclopedia Judaica," in Rosenzweig, *GS III, Zweistromland*. Italics mine.

[20] See James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature*, eds. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

of both *aggadic* and *halakhic* commentary in fact depends on a text with discontinuities, so commentators *created* "abnormalities" in order to respond to them.

In contrast to pre-modern exegetes' assumption of divine authorship of the Bible, which encouraged recognition of the complex and contradictory texture of scripture, Rosenzweig's concept of stylistic "unity" yielded a homogenized rather than a polyphonic text.[21] He repressed some of the more discontinuous or contradictory elements of the biblical text, and especially of the diversity of biblical style, for the admission of these elements was potentially threatening to his enterprise as a whole. He moreover failed to show exactly what it means to approach the text with knowledge of this dynamic tradition. Rosenzweig's quest for "unity," although alluding to a traditional Jewish hermeneutic stance, neither captured the tradition's complexity nor made room for the critical eye of the modern Bible scholar. But it does convey the degree to which Rosenzweig regarded the unity of the Bible as a metonym for the unity of both the Jewish people and the unity of the Jewish tradition. Shoring up the integrity of these embattled entities was the crucial task that shaped Rosenzweig's concept of unity of the Bible.

A MEANINGFUL TEXT: *LEITWORTE*

For Buber and Rosenzweig, the case for the unity of the Bible and the demonstration of the theological meaning of this unity was proven and illustrated on the evidence of the *Leitworte*, or "theme words." "*Leitwort*" was Buber's neologism, borrowed from the concept of the *Leitmotif*. On the face of it, "*Leitworte*" referred simply to the "theme words," or repeated Hebrew roots, that appeared within and across biblical passages and knitted the text together. Champions and critics of the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible alike agreed that the translation's abundant neologisms and verbal contortions were its signature quality.

[21] Leora Batnitzky has argued that Rosenzweig preserved the role of textual diversity in his biblical hermeneutics, stating that "[w]hile Higher Criticism's 'R' signifies disunity from the point of view of *Wissenschaft*, Rosenzweig's 'R' signifies unity from the point of view of a diverse and dynamic tradition." As I explain in the text, I think this is an overly generous assessment of Rosenzweig. [Cf. Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 125–26.]

Buber and Rosenzweig contorted ordinary German into what they believed was "Hebrew in German letters"[22] in an effort to preserve what they argued was one of the most striking features of biblical prose and the key to the coherence of the text, one they regarded as their own scholarly "discovery."

The grammatical structure and limited vocabulary of biblical Hebrew ensure that any individual linguistic root can and must resurface in a relatively large number of verbs and nouns, compared with most modern European languages. The placement of these cognates within a single narrative or in unrelated passages of the Bible, in Buber and Rosenzweig's view, established significant narrative links within the text. The theory is most clearly laid out in a 1927 address Buber delivered entitled "The Bible as Storyteller."[23] Buber, whose greater linguistic facility permitted him to appreciate this feature of biblical prose, described *Leitworte,* or "theme-words," as follows:

By *Leitwort* we mean a word or a word-root that repeats meaningfully within a text, a sequence of texts, or a set of texts: to the one who pursues these repetitions, a meaning of the text is opened up or clarified, or at any rate will be revealed more insistently. As we have said, it need not be the same word, but rather may be the same word-root that recurs in such a way; actually, it is often through the very differences that the dynamic cumulative effect is conveyed. I call it "dynamic" because within the sounds that are related to each other thus, a movement occurs: the one to whom the whole is present feels the waves batter against one another all around.

[22] Excellent treatments of the philosophical and cultural significance of Buber and Rosenzweig's approach (and contemporaneous critiques of it) can be found, respectively, in Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[23] This address was reprinted in the 1936 Schocken collection as "*Leitwort* Style in Pentateuch Narrative." A revised version of Buber's 1927 address was published in the 1936 Schocken volume (Buber and Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*). Rosenzweig himself admitted – and the manuscripts agree – that Buber was responsible for the lion's share of the Bible project's actual translational work (Franz Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis der Biblischen Erzählungen," in *Das Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 242; Franz Rosenzweig, "The Secret of Biblical Narrative Form," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 131. See Maren Ruth Niehoff, "The Buber-Rosenzweig Translation of the Bible within Jewish-German Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44, no. 2 (1993).

The measured repetition that corresponds to the inner rhythm of the text, or, better yet, pours out from it, is by all counts the most powerful of means for proclaiming meaning without stating it.[24]

Elsewhere, Buber described *Leitworte* as "paronomasia generally, including alliteration and assonance," and as "paronomasia *at a distance*, working not in immediate juxtaposition but over an extended stretch."[25] For him, *Leitworte* enabled the content or message of scripture to permeate its form, including word choice. The *Leitworte* depended on the oral aspect of scripture for their success, according to Buber, primarily because the listener was able to hear verbal resonances within the text that the reading eye might easily pass by.[26] In addition, Buber and Rosenzweig both identified each *Leitwort* with a single message within the stories. Sometimes the correspondence between the root-word in question and the meaning of the story is indirect, even subversive or ironic, but in each case, a single hidden but nonetheless decipherable message can be discerned within the text.

The *Leitworte* legitimated the idea of biblical unity, in Buber and Rosenzweig's view, because the linguistic connections within the text justified treating the Bible as a single work. This assumption pointed to the necessity of a new philosophy of translation that placed primacy on the preservation of Hebrew root-words and their purposeful repetition. Buber drew on the Pentateuch narratives of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), Koraḥ (Numbers 16–17), and the Abraham cycle (Genesis 12–18) to illustrate his point. For instance, the Koraḥ story, which tells of the gravest internal challenge to the community during its desert sojourns, is "controlled" primarily by the *Leitwort y-ʿa-d* (which has permutations of "appoint" such as *ʿedah,* "a company assembled together by appointment, acting in concert," and *moʿed,* "appointed time, place, meeting").[27]

[24] Martin Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1927), 211; Martin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Rosenwald and Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114.

[25] Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs," 212; Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," 114. Italics in original.

[26] I discuss later the significance for Buber and Rosenzweig of referring to the receiver of scripture as the "hearer" rather than the "reader."

[27] See F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1906), 416–18.

The force of this *Leitwort*, for Buber, derived from the fact that the motif of assembly and the problem of appointing legitimate authority is the key issue in this episode.[28] Thus the meaning of the *Leitwort* did not necessarily bear a direct correspondence to the moral of the narrative, but (as in this instance) may reveal its subject through deliberate and subversive irony.

Rosenzweig's 1928 essay "The Formal Secret of Biblical Narratives" ("Das Formgeheimnis der biblischen Erzählungen," originally published in the prominent conservative literary and cultural journal *Kunstwart*) built upon Buber's 1927 address. Rosenzweig argued that "key words," folk etymologies, and paronomasia created what he calls a "secret bivocality," a "dialogical back and forth" [*eine geheime Zweistimmigkeit, ein dialogishes Hin und Her*] in the text that ensured both the unity and the dynamism of the Bible.[29] The "key words" within it create links among disparate pieces of text, subtly reinterpreting them. Rosenzweig's metaphorical description of this phenomenon envisioned *Leitworte* as "ties and clamps" holding together the biblical text: "The ties and clamps can lie quite dense up against one another, but they can also be separated over wide distances of narrative, and indeed can clasp together even separate individual narratives into a higher narrative unity."[30] In all of this, Rosenzweig echoes Buber's main point, and illustrates it with examples from the Jacob story (Genesis 29; 32) and Balaam's talking ass (Numbers 22).

As Buber and Rosenzweig saw it, recognition of the *Leitworte* as a key to biblical style served to further the agenda of reorienting critical biblical study in a number of ways. The *Leitworte* suggested that latent or hidden theological meanings illuminate a subterranean stratum of the text. These meanings complicate and nuance the apparent, or literal, reading of the narratives that higher criticism, or even Gunkel's "tradition-historical" method, accepted at face value. In Buber's words, speaking of the *Leitworte 'edah* and *qarev* in the Koraḥ story:

Investigating such a narrative can make us feel that we have discovered a hidden, primordial midrash [*versteckten Urmidrasch entdeckte*] in the

[28] Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs," 217–18; Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," 118.
[29] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 260; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 141.
[30] Ibid.

biblical text itself; and we may then be dubious. But the correspondences are so exact, and fit so perfectly into the situation as a whole, that we have to accept the idea: that the roots of the 'secret meaning' reach deep into the earlier layers of the tradition.[31]

The language of "midrash" here is not incidental. It accords with Buber and Rosenzweig's careful insertion of references to rabbinic exegesis into their essays, and it suggests that they viewed classical Jewish sources as consonant with the mode of reading they hoped to promote. The assertion that the Bible is a subtle, self-referential text furthermore aimed to counter the perception of it as an inadequate and contradictory would-be record of historical events, on the one hand, or the retelling of ancient Near Eastern myths distinguished only by its monotheistic agenda, on the other. This strategy aimed to rescue biblical prose from misclassification by arguing that biblical prose was a genre with its own literary priorities. Finally, consideration of the *Leitworte* provided ammunition in Buber and Rosenzweig's quest to show the indivisibility of biblical content and form and the irreducibility of language itself in apprehending the Bible's meaning. The text, for them, was not mere epic or a stylized literary work of prose-poetry that aspires to artistic merit for its own sake; it was a work that exhibits a privileged understanding of human beings and their task in the world that still has theological and moral weight today.

Although Buber and Rosenzweig offer a plethora of examples of *Leitworte* in the biblical narratives, they are strikingly reticent when it comes to the "why" of the *Leitworte*. Both authors endow the *Leitworte* with the power of authorial intent, but they never directly confront the problem of how the text came to possess this remarkable feature. The message of the narratives seems to have been planted in the biblical narratives by what we today might dubiously call Intelligent Design: the

[31] Martin Buber, *Werke* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1962); Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative." 120. Many scholars have since commented at grent length on what is called, in academic circles, inner-biblical exegesis: see Isaac Leo Seeligman, "Voraussetzung der Midrasch-Exegese," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 1 (1953); Nahum Sarna, "Psalm 89: A Study in Inner-Biblical Exegesis," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

text, Buber and Rosenzweig imply, is simply too brilliant and complex to have come about through ordinary human processes. Certainly Buber and Rosenzweig make no mention of the biblical author or authors, nor even, in this context, of the redactor as an active agent in bringing a skillful eye and hand to pieces of text.

Buber and Rosenzweig's conceptualization of the role of the reader in detecting the *Leitworte* is rife with prevarication and even confusion. For instance, they argue that the *Leitworte* establish a "secret bivocality" within the text, but they specify neither speaker nor addressee in the dialogue. Recall that in explaining the *Leitwort* phenomenon, Buber wrote that "to the one who pursues these repetitions, a meaning of the text is opened up or clarified, or at any rate will be revealed more insistently." This leaves open the question of whether the text's meaning exists objectively in it or is constructed by the reader. Likewise Buber and Rosenweig suggest that "the measured repetition" created by the *Leitworte* both "corresponds to the inner rhythm of the text, or, better yet, pours out from it." The equivocation is part of a strategy that deliberately leaves open questions of agency and authorship. Buber and Rosenzweig refocus attention onto the text's impact on the reader while avoiding taking a stand in regard to the text's origin.

Rosenzweig's essays in particular reveal a striking ambivalence about whether the Bible's theological and moral claims could be attributed to the text itself or to the reader who found guidance within it. His essay "The Formal Secret of Biblical Narratives" turns on the significance of the *Leitworte* in the narratives, without ever explaining how they arrived there: the measure-for-measure effect of Jacob's deception of Isaac and Laban's subsequent deception of Jacob (as emphasized by the repetition of "deceit" [G: *Trug*; H: *mirmah*]); the power of irony in the angel's rebuke of Balaam following Balaam's mistreatment of his ass (as evidenced by the repetition of "for then" [G: *drum daß nun*; H: *ki 'atah*]). Rosenzweig asserts, through his explication of these examples, that the *Leitworte* demonstrate and attest to a theological and moral vision within the text itself. He frequently framed the significance of the verbal repetitions and permutations of the biblical text in narratological terms. He argued that individual biblical episodes and multiple stories "hang together" because of their linguistic connections. Conversely, he indicated that the linguistic connections give insight into the true nature of

the story and its "moral." For instance, the "measure for measure" effect created by the *Leitworte* could be seen as demonstrating not only the coherence of the text but, beyond that, the justice of God's world.[32] Rosenzweig did not draw out the specific theological point of each narrative; indeed, he consistently indicated that there was a meaning without making clear what it was. This gap is probably due to Rosenzweig's view of reductive critical scholarship as his main opponent; the assertion of the text's integrity was his main consideration.

Within this evocative yet ill-defined schema, Rosenzweig gave the *Leitworte* an additional theological dimension. He argued that the *Leitworte* demonstrated the biblical text's dialogical quality, and that this quality enabled it to model the dialogical relationship the reader would ideally have with it. The "ties and clamps" holding the biblical narratives together served a function beyond that of communicating the "meaning" of the narratives to the reader. Biblical narratives, he wrote, were uniquely self-contained. In this respect, they are unlike the parts of the Bible in which a "you" – divine or human – is directly addressed, because the narrative sections lack an implied reader. In contrast to law, prophecy, or psalmody, the narratives do not provide an opening for the reader to imagine being the addressee (or the author) of the words of the text. Rosenzweig argued that the *Leitworte* compensated for the hermetic nature of the narratives. In making this argument, Rosenzweig asks his reader to believe that the non-narrative parts of the Bible (the legal and the prophetic sections and the Psalms) are "dialogical" by nature. Rosenzweig explains his meaning not in terms of an objective quality of the prose but in terms of how the Bible has been and continues to be taken up by the reader:

> The incorporation of a dialogic element . . . has been discussed here as a principle of biblical narrative form. It is in fact present in the Bible not only in narrative but also in the Bible's other genres . . . But its significance there is of course less. Punishment and promise, praise and supplication and thanksgiving, law and proverb are much less likely than is narrative to 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

[32] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 251; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 136–37.

prayer, when the laws are followed, when the prophecies are believed, they lose immediately their monologic dumbness and gain a voice to call the eternal interlocutor to dialogue: dialogue between man who listens and God who hears.[33]

"Dialogical" texts, then, are those in which the reader can imagine being either the text's addressee (such as the legal and prophetic texts, which abound with the second-person) or its voice (such as the Psalms, which often contain the first-person).

Rosenzweig's use of the concept of "dialogue" here is hardly conventional. Rather, it conveys his insistence that the words of the Bible serve as the means for a "conversation" between the reader and God. His goal was to bring the reader into dialogue with the text and inscribe the reader into the way the text's meaning was to be revealed. This need was not to be addressed by involving the reader as an addressee, but through a shift in the mind of the reader, by which the narratives are understood as themselves "speaking" within the text.

In writing of the non-narrative sections of the Bible that "writing drapes them only lightly," Rosenzweig imagined the living voice of the text as animating the words and thus casting off their utilitarian formal qualities.[34] The "parts of [the Bible] that have arisen from dialogue" (again, the law, Psalms, and prophecies) "call back the human partner in that dialogue again and again." The narrative sections employ the *Leitworte*, which function as a kind of inner-biblical "dialogue," in order to "transform distant hearers into collaborators" – that is, into actors.[35] In other words, Rosenzweig argued that the *Leitworte* enabled the reader to "hear" God's voice in the text and to respond to it through

[33] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 259; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 141.

[34] This insight is an important component of Rosenzweig's aesthetic – that is, of the aesthetic that he insisted again and again was not "an aesthetic" at all but was the best representation possible of the Hebrew Bible's prose itself. Siegfried Kracauer's critique of the aesthetic of the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible is full of contempt for the aesthetic approach of Buber and Rosenzweig; see "The Bible in German," in *The Mass Ornament*, ed. Thomas Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). The critique and the debate it generated have been analyzed in Martin Jay, "Politics of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible," New York: *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 21 (1976); Lawrence Rosenwald, "On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig's Bible," *Prooftexts* 14, no. 2 (1994); Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*.

[35] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 259; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 141.

praxis, prayer, and belief. The text thus remained open to the content the reader would give it.

The theological ambiguity Rosenzweig exhibits here testifies to seemingly deliberate guile. Rosenzweig shifted his emphasis quite strikingly to accommodate different audiences and epistolary interlocutors. But the underlying social significance of Rosenzweig's position remains constant: the "openness" toward biblical narrative Rosenzweig envisioned offers a clear view of his ideal audience. They are those modern Jews who are least likely to take up the Bible into their lives as a matter of daily praxis. These are Rosenzweig's readers – the individuals most susceptible to "objectifying" the text rather than engaging it. For the danger of aesthetic fetishization does not face, in Rosenzweig's view, the observant Jew, for whom *aggadic* and *halakhic* midrash serve consistently to bring narratives into the world of praxis. For them, the narrative is transformed into the stuff of daily life. Thus Rosenzweig's interest in guarding against "aestheticization" of biblical narrative suggests an audience untouched by praxis. It points to the degree to which not only he but also his readers were removed from a deeply practical understanding of the text. His zeal exposes a desire to create a living relationship to the Bible in an era in which the traditional forms of doing so were, for most readers, impossible.

THE VOICE OF THE TEXT: *KOLOMETRIE*

The (re)creation of an audience capable of literally hearing scripture formed a central piece of Buber and Rosenzweig's endeavor. The identification and rendering of the *Leitworte* constituted the first half of the realization of this ambition. The intact rendering of *Leitworte* in German would, they felt, clearly establish the legitimacy of the mandate to bring scripture to the ears of their audience, for the pervasive recurrence of Hebrew roots attested to the integrity of scripture as an oral text.[36]

[36] Until the cultural transformation generated by the printing press, scripture was indeed encountered and known primarily in oral and aural, rather than literary, contexts. On the orality of the Hebrew scriptures, see Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 B.C.E.–400 C.E.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, eds., *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

Goaded on by a missionary zeal, Rosenzweig believed that his own translation would expose the density and thus the necessary interconnections within the biblical text that previous German translations had obscured. Setting the *Leitworte* in the foreground would thus give new life to the oral element in a text that had become "dead letter" for the largely assimilated German Jews who were Buber and Rosenzweig's primary audience.

The other half of Buber and Rosenzweig's strategy centered on a translational technique they called *Kolometrie*. Colometry [English] referred to the division of prose into units the length of a breath, which they called *cola*.[37] For Buber and Rosenzweig, colometry served as the visual representation of a principle they believed was inherent in the biblical text and its self-presentation: the primacy of the role of breathing in the reading of scripture. The translators hoped the text they produced would be striking not only in its linguistic innovations but also in its visual appearance. The colometric principle assured that the volumes, which appeared individually as each book of the Bible was translated, looked remarkably different from the bibles most readers had encountered. The pages were deliberately uncluttered: generous with space, spare with ink. At first glance, the average reader would probably have identified a volume's contents as poetry, not prose, since the lines were sometimes only a word or several words long, and at most a short sentence.

This aesthetic feature was the result of a principled decision based on the idea that "every word is a spoken word," the assertion that opens Rosenzweig's 1925 essay "Scripture and Word." He and Buber determined the maximum length of each line of text, Rosenzweig explains, according to the length of an ordinary human breath. The "natural segmentation of speech" by the breath, for Rosenzweig, regulates speech and silence, and "mirrors directly the movements and arousals of the soul itself in its gradations of energy and above all in its gradations of time."[38]

[37] Buber and Rosenzweig built upon a concept that had already been in circulation with regard to New Testament reading, as indicated by Rosenzweig's reference to Roland Schütz, "Die Bedeutung der Kolometrie für das Neue Testament" (*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft,* 1922), in Franz Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 43.

[38] Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 81; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 43.

In other words, it was the task of the translator to uncover the rhythm of the text and bring it to the page both by the choice of words and by determining the aesthetic presentation of the words in accordance with it.

At work in this implementation of *Kolometrie* was a set of negotiations and renegotiations of the authority of the reader, the translator, the text, and the tradition. The technique purportedly put the authority for establishing the rhythm of the text squarely into the body – the mouth, the lungs, and the spirit – of the reader. The reader's own breath was to move through the words and give them life, a proposition that was radically individualistic in its implications. At the same time, in dividing up the text by cola, Rosenzweig was guided not by the Masoretic punctuation, established in the ninth century and regarded as religiously authoritative, but by his own sense of the rhythm of the breath. As the translator, Rosenzweig would wield the authority to determine how scripture would be spoken – a privilege that was once the province of a trusted elite. In one of his examples of colometry at work, Rosenzweig does not appeal to any authority but his own in overthrowing "logic" for what is "vital":

> Sentences that in unambiguous logic are distinct and so separated by periods – say, Cain's appalling answer, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' – are by the rendering of the vital, breathing course of speech brought together into a single movement, and thus given their full horror, previously half covered-over by the logical punctuation.[39]

The relationship between the written word and the orality on which its vitality depends is the focus of "Scripture and Word." Like the myth told in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the free, spontaneous word is fettered and bound once it is committed to writing. The decline of the oral word then engenders a culture of *Schrifttum* that envelops language and puts spiritual freedom in chains. Rosenzweig does not need to explicitly recount the mythical etiological tale of the bondage of the free word to exploit its force. The process of the book's domination over the word culminates in a lament: "Instead of serving the word, the book becomes the word's ruler and obstructer; it becomes 'Holy Scripture.' "[40] "Holy Scripture," here, is a term of irony, almost derision: it signifies the

[39] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 81; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 43.
[40] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 76; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 42.

sanctification of the text at the cost of the spontaneous – and hence (potentially) revelatory – movement of the word to the reader. As such, "Holy Scripture" does not simply correspond to the Hebrew Bible, in Rosenzweig's account, but rather indicates a type of literature found in all Western cultures. Homer, Plato, and the Christian Bible are "holy scripture" insofar as these works definitively severed the link between spoken and written word and relegated orality to position of handmaiden. Rosenzweig indeed uses "holy scripture" for any work of sufficient cultural magnitude to have generated an oral tradition devoted to it[41] ("however dubious in itself, like the *pilpul* [*Rabelismus*] of the Talmud, the dialectic of the scholastics, the lecturing at modern universities, the administrative control of the word in Protestant preaching"). "holy scripture" was, then, not any particular book or set of canonical works but rather that book which comes to claim a place of preeminence within the culture in which it is read, and which becomes the reference point around which the culture is constituted.[42]

This subtle allusion to sociological criteria as those by which any text, including the Bible, could be classified as "holy scripture" once again underscores the tension within Buber and Rosenzweig's translation project. The power of the biblical text is unavoidably tied up with the history of its readership. The application of "colometric" principles to the translation of the biblical text supports the privileging of the reader, who ultimately animates the text by breathing the breath of life into the words. *Kolometrie* and the oral nature of the Bible to which it supposedly pointed allowed Buber and Rosenzweig to emphasize the role of the reader in maintaining or even creating the vitality of the Bible. This refocused attention from the Bible's supposedly inherent quality in the style of biblical prose and poetry to the *fate* of the Bible, which is determined, ultimately, not by the nature of the Bible itself but by its treatment at the hands of its readers. "It is the special destiny of the Bible," writes Rosenzweig, "that this last surviving and yet continually abiding oral book has been preserved for our world and our time, which are a world and time of writing."[43] Rosenzweig was ultimately unwilling

[41] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 77; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 41.
[42] See Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
[43] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 257–58; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 140.

to concede the power of "holy scripture" to the text itself. This argument could not convince an audience all too aware of the human nature of the Bible. Rosenzweig could only assert that the uniqueness of the Bible resided not in its authorship or style but in its readership.

Yet as Rosenzweig knew all too well, this readership was quite different from that of previous centuries. Rosenzweig's insistence upon calling the one who encounters the biblical text the "hearer" (rather than the reader) of scripture is part strategy, part fantasy. It conjures the world of pre-modern religious communities, the world before the transformation of scripture into text that was read rather than heard. This self-conscious choice indicates the imagined community with which Rosenzweig would ideally align himself: not the scholarly or simply secular reader of the Bible, and not even the faithful reader who encounters the text privately, but rather the one who reads the Bible within a faith community. Rosenzweig's imagined "hearer," unlike a "reader," hears the biblical word from within a community of listeners, where the Bible is called or preached aloud, for if one is a "hearer" then there must also be another person who "speaks" or gives voice to the text.[44] Rosenzweig implies that the silent, solitary reader of the Bible cannot authentically access it. The Bible can be properly heard – or, better, *potentially* heard – only in a religious community, the traditional locus for its reading. Paradoxically, however, the translation's attempt to mimic the religious community in its self-contained pages does not in fact force the reader into a community but rather supplants it.

This community was a fantasy, not a reality, in Rosenzweig's world. His invocation of the "hearer" of scripture – and indeed the very concept of *Kolometrie* – pointed more toward his normative longings than any descriptive reality. In this sense, Rosenzweig's project must be viewed as

[44] At other points, it seems Rosenzweig portrays the orality of the text such that the text itself is envisioned as "speaking" to the reader (or listener) as if it were a person. This notion of the text as a "speaking I" grants it a greater claim on the "listening Thou" than an otherwise inert page has on an autonomous reader. Kepnes has written at length about Buber's concept of this phenomenon in Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*. On Buber and Rosenzweig's closely related but independent concepts of the "I-Thou" relationship, see Rivka Horwitz, *Buber's Way to "I and Thou:" The Development of Martin Buber's Thought and His "Religion as Presence" Lectures* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1988). Note here that in Rosenzweig, the individual is usually the "Thou" addressed by the divine or textual "I," whereas in Buber, the individual more often is the "I" who first addresses the textual "Thou."

a response to the challenges of the modern period for communal Jewish identity. Moshe Halbertal has argued that the rabbinic and medieval "text-centered" Jewish community cohered because of the binding force of classical texts within it. As Jewish communities encountered emancipation, they saw the emergence of a "modern national Jewish identity," which, Halbertal writes, "is in many ways a sign of the loss of the centrality of the text as the binding force" for Jewish communal identity.[45] For Rosenzweig, the Bible project signified the first step toward the ultimate aspiration of (re)creating a text-centered Jewish identity. The concept of *Kolometrie* in the Bible translation illustrates this point most forcefully.

Rosenzweig knew that the presumptions of the colometric endeavor were quixotic. In turning a neo-Romantic conjecture about the role of breath in the reading of scripture into a centerpiece of the translation, Buber and Rosenzweig attempted to create artificially what they knew was missing for most of their potential readership – authentic participation in a community:

> Remember that our task in making the lineation is not the task of those who placed the accents there in the first place: that task was simply not present for them, since for them the orality of the *miqra'*, the 'calling out,' was assured by the laws of worship, and they needed accordingly to attend only within this assured orality to the need for comprehensibility.[46]

Buber and Rosenzweig's readers were precisely those who did *not* hear the Bible read aloud – the very activity the two thinkers asserted to be essential to the understanding of Hebrew scripture in the Jewish tradition.[47]

The technique of *Kolometrie*, and indeed the entire translation project, marks the modern privatization of religious experience – and Buber and Rosenzweig's concession to it. The B-R translation was not specifically intended to be used in traditional, communal liturgical contexts, although in fact many of those in the German youth

[45] Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 9.

[46] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 82; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 44.

[47] William Graham, in *Beyond the Written Word,* has argued that oral and/or performative experience is central to the idea of scripture in many traditions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Lutheran theology. See also F. E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

movement greeted and used the translation enthusiastically. Indeed, Buber and Rosenzweig undertook their project at the invitation of the private publisher and entrepreneur Lambert Schneider, not at the behest of the organized Jewish community (as was another contemporaneous translation[48]). By aiming their efforts at both Christian and Jewish readers as individuals rather than as members of faith communities, the translators sought to simulate the experience of being part a community without actually enjoining their readers to do so. The technique of *Kolometrie* signified the end of the communal experience of scripture and the attempt to compensate for it.[49]

A PRIVILEGED TEXT: THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

The exceptionality of the Bible, like its "unity," conjures a variety of other qualities: its transmission, its singular authority, and its absolute truth-value. The overriding issue that Rosenzweig's reading of the Bible had to face was the conclusion toward which the work of Wellhausen, Delitzsch, and other luminaries of turn-of-the-century critical Bible scholarship indisputably pointed: the Bible was neither ontologically, historically, nor generically unique. If the Bible could not be said to be "true" in any general or even any specifiable sense, could it still be authoritative? For a number of Protestant scholars, undermining the authority of the Old Testament also undermined the foundations of post-biblical Judaism. For Rosenzweig, sympathetic to the legitimacy of rabbinic Judaism as an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, the question was no less vital. The question facing Rosenzweig was whether the Bible had to yield its claim of uniqueness to the far less urgent, but more defensible, claim that it was distinctive, or the yet more tepid claim that it was meaningful.[50]

[48] Details of Lambert Schneider's invitation to Buber and Rosenzweig, along with a discussion of the other translation project, which was undertaken by a group of scholars and rabbis beginning in 1924, can be found in Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 104. Gordon also discusses this translation in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*.

[49] On the Jewish-Christian politics of *Kolometrie* for Buber and Rosenzweig, see Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 179–87.

[50] On these questions in contemporary theology, see Gary Comstock, "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur Versus Frei on Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Religion* 66, no. 2 (1986); Garrett Green, ed., *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

This fundamental and unanswered question animated Rosenzweig's defense of the unity of the Bible, his illustration of this unity through the discussion of the hidden theological significances of the *Leitworte*, and his attempt to make these aims clear to the "listener" through the principle of *Kolometrie*. But he also addressed the matter of the Bible's uniqueness directly, and shows there how far he had come from his earlier invocation of the Bible's unqualified power as the voice of revelation itself. Now, at the end of his life, Rosenzweig asserted that the Bible attained its status because of its historical, sociological importance to a group (if not groups) of readers. This conclusion, he knew, was the only one that could be defended in the face of the many challenges to the intrinsic uniqueness of the text.

In 1921, early in his translational career, Rosenzweig drafted an address entitled "Bible Criticism." In his notes for the address, Rosenzweig asked:

> Would anyone be so crazy as to no longer read Faust as it is printed? And has the value of *Werther* since Bernays' textual emendation increased or decreased? For the work of literature, textual criticism is irrelevant. So, too, higher criticism. But under certain circumstances, higher criticism can make something else accessible: the history of literature, the history of origins; in the case of our example: the Goethean personality. . . . But rest assured that the Romantics of the turn of the nineteenth century had discovered him without benefit of philology.[51]

The conclusion he drew in regard to the Bible was clear enough: "It is simply indisputable," he continues, "that the Bible is (at least *also*) a book like all other books."[52] It must therefore be regarded as subject to the same critical scrutiny as all other literature, even if, ultimately, this critical scrutiny has not and will never ultimately determine the affective potential of the text. He continued:

> We must not forget that above the authors and above the milieus is the actual author. Just as beyond the "Young Goethe," the "old Goethe," the "classical," the "romanticist" Goethe, the *Sturm-und-Drang* period, the Weimar court, and so on and so forth – beyond all these, the holy figure of Goethe in general stands, to whom philology, through a circuitous

[51] "Die Bibelkritik," in Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland*.
[52] Rosenzweig, "Die Bibelkritik," ibid.

route, clears a path, whom then the naïve and attuned reader grasps directly from the printed word – so, too, above Moses and David and Isaiah and whatever else we call the traditional authors (or above J and E and JE and E1, E2, E3 and P and R) hovers the true author, the author whom the rightly attuned reader perceives at once. The elders cited *amar rachmana* [the Merciful One said], not *amar Moshe* [Moses said]. If Orthodoxy sinks its teeth into calling Moses the author, then it deserves the dissolution of this portrait into the concepts of J and E and P . . . .[53]

This early address set much of the tone for Rosenzweig's later writings about the way the traditional claims for the Bible's uniqueness should be translated into modern categories. Among the themes that prove common are Rosenzweig's declaration of the Bible's invincibility from the documentary hypothesis; his rhetorical appeal to other great works of literature; the vaguely defined but emphatically asserted superiority of the theology and exegetical parameters of traditional Judaism.[54]

The claim that the Bible's literary qualities, in particular, its integration of content and form, distinguish it from all other books surfaces again and again in Rosenzweig's essays on the Bible. It is a claim that he ultimately could not sustain, for the conclusion that the Bible is simply another great work of literature cannot sustain the privileged place he wants to accord to it. But this categorical is a recurring temptation. Again and again he compares the Bible with other great works of literature – the Odyssey, Faust, and others – only to undermine the validity of the comparison.

Rosenzweig suggests that the Bible reigns over the small class of works regarded as "timeless" in Western civilization: the Odyssey, Shakespeare, and the Divine Comedy. Notably absent from his choice of comparisons are the more geographically and historically proximate epics of the ancient Near East. These sources go completely unmentioned in his

[53] "Die Bibelkritik," ibid. Rosenzweig refers here to the schools of biblical authorship commonly referred to as J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), P (Priestly), and D (Deuteronomist), as well as R (Redactor).

[54] See, for example, the direct echo of these comments in the Encyclopedia Judaica review. In arguing that the aim of studying the Bible is understanding it as a whole, he writes that the Bible is meant to be "[u]nderstood in the sense of the final redaction, not in the sense of individual bits which are to be peeled from the sources – just like Faust would be read as it is and not as the philological approach to Goethe, which separates out biographical layers and intellectual-historical influences, would read it" ("Zur Encyclopedia Judaica," ibid.).

published essays. Consider the juxtaposition of Homer and the Bible in the following passage from "The Formal Secret of Biblical Narratives." Admitting that biblical narratives often contain formulae, such as "there was evening, and there was morning" in Genesis 1, Rosenzweig goes on to assert:

> What distinguishes the vital, ever-driving [*den lebhaften, die Erzählungen weitertreibenden*] character of these formulas from the pictorial character of their Homeric equivalents is that they are never fixed in a single verbal form; they are not the colors of things but the joints of the story. In Homer, all who eat, whether early or late in the narrative, 'put their hands to the good things that lie before them,' and this is a large factor in the great Homeric perception of the unity of man in all times and in all places . . . In Homer too, then, there is a form that reveals the innermost nature of the poem's content, with a power and a clarity not to be had by any other means. Form – real form, not 'poetic form,' and substance – true substance, not apparent, indicable 'content' – are indivisible.[55]

Rosenzweig's point in this passage was not that the Bible achieves a unique blending of content and form; all great works integrate content and form, and their particularity is established by what the resulting unity conveys.[56] Rather, for Rosenzweig, the character of biblical prose was uniquely "vital," and he attributed this vitality to the fact that the formulae – by which he means not primarily the verbal formulae themselves but the sense of repetition and timelessness in history that they serve to convey – form the "joints of the story," its critical junctures, rather than its backdrop. In other words, Homeric epic conveys to the reader the sense that "Homer's sun shines for us also," an assessment Rosenzweig takes from Schiller.

Rosenzweig translates Schiller's insight into a theological point: Homer's vision may be universal and eternal, but it is not "vital" or "driving" because it makes no demands upon the reader. The Odyssey incorporates the reader into a conception of human history that is, in the end, stagnant because it is eternal.[57] The formulae in the Bible, by

[55] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 257; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 139–40.
[56] Batnitzky has argued this point in Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 111ff.
[57] "Eternity" and "vitality" have a valence opposite to Rosenzweig's use of these terms in Part III of *Star*; there, the Jews, the "eternal people," already sit at one with God and redemption and have no need for "life."

contrast, convey the paradox of human history, in which recurrence is accompanied by novelty and the meaning of change is guaranteed by links to the past. In this case, then, it appears that the Bible has a particular literary feature that ensures its uniqueness.[58]

But a palpable ambivalence marks Rosenzweig's venture into the terrain of literary studies of the Bible. Writing privately to Buber, Rosenzweig sought to jettison an artistic metaphor in favor of a scientific one:

> Whoever expects a work of art simply cannot understand us. But it *is* one anyway. But as something visible only to the one who does not seek it. It's like the elegance of a mathematical proof, which only strikes one who has mathematical interests, not one who goes looking for elegance.[59]

The danger that the special quality of the Bible would be forfeited was not lost on Rosenzweig. To compare the Bible to the Odyssey is, of course, to assume that each work was authored by a human hand and is thus fundamentally comparable to other literary works.

Rosenzweig's private correspondence attests to the theological dangers associated with a quasi-literary lens on the Bible. Rosenzweig's awareness of the dangers of stylistic comparison led him to adamantly reject associating his and Buber's analytical work with literary studies and the Bible with literature. A fascinating letter to Rudolf Hallo illuminates the tension in Rosenzweig's position. He began by paraphrasing Hallo's question, to which Rosenzweig's letter responds:

> You write that the problem is how we humans, who have not been naïve for some time (since our childhood days), and who live working fully with the concepts, methods, and words of a no-longer-naïve manner of living – how we are still to stand toward that naïve narrative in a relationship of deeper meaning and higher value than we have with naïve narratives as such?[60]

[58] Cf. Erich Auerbach's famous comparison of Homer's *Odyssey* with Genesis in his 1953 *Mimesis*. Auerbach undertook this comparison "in order to reach a starting point for an investigation into the literary representation of reality in European culture," and to develop two different models of historical representation as well [Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 19]. Rosenzweig, by contrast, compares the two texts in order to privilege the biblical model.

[59] Letter 1173 (September 2, 1927), to Buber, in Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 1041–42.

[60] Letter 1021 (June 5, 1925), to Rudolf Hallo, in ibid.

Lurking here are two questions here: first, given that our ways of thinking are "no longer naïve" – that is, disenchanted – how can we regard a text immersed in a naïve conception of the world as authoritative; second, if we grant that the Bible is a fairy tale, what makes it more compelling for us than any other fairy tale?

Rosenzweig's answer touches on both of these questions. He responds to the first question by arguing that the Bible – metonymically represented by Genesis – represents reality as we experience it. This everyday experience of reality is, he asserts, not "disenchanted" by science at all. Rather, Rosenzweig claims, our primary experience of the world is one characterized by use rather than detachment. The Genesis narrative represents our primary experience of the world (which accounts for its fairy-tale quality) without taking recourse to mythical explanations of the world:

> Here [in Genesis 1], . . . there appears no giant or dragon "out" of whose hair the forests, and from whose limbs the mountains are made . . . And that's why the tale of Genesis 1, which renounces all explanation as it narrates how all things are created by the word alone, is the great justification for common sense on the basis of the truth.[61]

Although Genesis 1 indeed refrains from explicit etiological myths ("explanation"), Rosenzweig's claim is perplexing.[62] Is Hallo – are we – expected to be content with the assertion that Genesis is a "justification for common sense" and to grant that creation *ex nihilo* provides the proof?

Rosenzweig's claim that Genesis must be treated as non-mythological (and even "non-literary"[63]) constituted a subtle refutation of the position of Hermann Gunkel and his followers. In an effort to take Bible criticism beyond the work of Wellhausen, Gunkel emphasized the need to understand, within the various genres of biblical writings, the traces of earlier, mythological narratives such as those found in Genesis. For Rosenzweig, this "mythological" treatment of Genesis threatened to

[61] Ibid.

[62] The narrative of Genesis 1 itself does, however, serve as an etiology for the weekly cycle of six days of work followed by the Sabbath. Intertextual references to Genesis 2:2–3 in Exodus 39:42–43, among others, helped lay the foundation for the conceptual link between divine creation and human creation, which then are the basis of rabbinic elaboration.

[63] Rosenzweig elides the concepts of mythical literature and "literature" as such: in this same letter, Rosenzweig writes of Genesis 1, "Its literary side lies merely in the selection with which it represents 'all things.' "

turn it into an ordinary "fairy tale," far removed from the present time and consciousness. Instead, he argues that the naïveté of the narrative represents, to the greatest degree possible, the basic human experience of the world. To regard it as a credible and authoritative text, Rosenzweig argues, we must reexamine our way of experiencing the world.

But is the Bible a uniquely authoritative text? Hallo's second point raised this question; in response, Rosenzweig had to justify the distinctiveness of the Bible among other narratives. His response is remarkably thin, even disingenuous. While Rosenzweig definitively declared, "The exceptionality of the narrative is its – theme,"[64] he failed to state what the "theme" of the narrative is. Other sources provide hints of an answer. Unlike Buber, who explained in a variety of works and places what he thought the heart of scripture was, Rosenzweig provided only gleanings.[65] In "Scripture and Word," Rosenzweig refers to the "essential content" of scripture as "the word of God to man, the word of man to God, the word of men before God."[66] This is perhaps the most explicit statement of scripture's *Sache*, its "subject matter." Is this content what makes the Bible, or Genesis at least, different from any other fairy tale? Rosenzweig's last paragraph of his response to Hallo circles back to address this question. "By the way," he writes of Genesis, "it is not literature, but truth." He elaborates:

> When one recounts the tale of Hänsel and Gretel, it surely needs to be pretty. For neither the witch nor the parents will be on that account a more false portrayal of themselves; they cannot raise objections – because they don't exist. But when one wants to tell the tale of God's revelation, it is a much more precarious matter, for it does not suffice that it be pretty, but it must also be true. For one runs the risk that God will raise objections, because there is a difference between the witch and the parents and Him. It cannot be indifferent to him was sort of tale is told about him to his children – no less than the name by which they call him.

Rosenzweig tried to convince Hallo that the difference between ordinary fairy tales and the biblical narratives is that the former are fanciful, wholly fictional, and thus of no real consequence, whereas the latter are

[64] Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 1041–42.

[65] Buber articulated definitions of the meaning and content of the Bible in his work more precisely; see Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 122.

[66] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 78; Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Word," 41.

of grave significance because they must be "true." The biblical tales must be of supra-literary and not merely literary value.

This argument only has weight for the one already convinced of the reality of God and the exceptional status of the Bible. Perhaps for this reason, Rosenzweig's statements here must be read as an admission of sorts that there is no objectively valid and universally satisfying answer to Hallo's query about what makes this narrative special and unique and of deeper significance than the ordinary tale.

Rosenzweig's final remarks to Hallo touch on the relationship between the Bible's truth and the tools we use to understand it:

> They [the stories of Genesis] may remain fairy tales; you need not be worried that the text will be lost to the realm of literary research. All narratives will as such become fairy tales; that is only human, and God wants what is human, even in his own revelation. But here the object is not so indifferent as is otherwise (in my opinion wholly incorrectly) claimed in scholarship of literature and art.

Rosenzweig wishes to maintain two incommensurate positions. On the one hand, he refuses to declare that the narratives of Genesis are out-of-bounds for scholarly research; on the other, he dismisses the narrowness of the scholarly view and suggests that the "object" [*Gegenstand*] transcends the realm of scholarship. More positively read, we can say that the sharp distinction Rosenzweig wanted to draw between literature and truth was not meant to suggest that the biblical narratives should not be the object of literary inquiry, but rather that this inquiry cannot exhaust their meaning and neither should it (or can it) turn the narratives into yet another story alongside ordinary ones. Rosenzweig's response also underscored the role of "what is human" and its proper place inside the realm of God's revelation. The coda suggests that the approach from within literary studies, in Rosenzweig's view, holds that the tools of criticism can usefully be applied to any work regardless of the topic. Rosenzweig states, by contrast, that the tools must fit the topic, and that the topic (or "theme") itself requires special treatment. But, as I suggested earlier, those special tools are not methodologically objective but rather are supplied by an engaged community of readers.

The opposition between literature and truth sidesteps the most important question that arises out of considering whether and how

the biblical narratives require a different attitude than others. What does it mean for the Bible to be "true"? Clearly, it could not be the facticity of a historical record; Rosenzweig would regard any evaluation of it with historical accuracy as the criterion of truth as "Protestant *Wissenschaft*." On the other hand, the hyperliteral translation Buber and Rosenzweig produced suggests that neither was truth to be found in a Pauline emphasis on "spirit" over and above the Pharisaic "letter," for the "letter," for both Buber and Rosenzweig, was the indispensable vessel of the spirit. Rosenzweig ruled out the possibility that truth might possess a literary aspect, for this would open him to the charge that the Bible was "mere" fairy tale. Instead, Rosenzweig claimed that the Bible is "true," but nowhere explained what that means or how the truth of the Bible maps onto its content and form.

Few contemporaneous theologians offered better answers. Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans* sought to convince the reader of the incontrovertible truth of Paul's message by means of a frontal assault. Barth's introduction addressed the question of method briefly, arguing that critical scholarship serves as prolegomenon to the deeper level of analysis he proposes. But the bulk of the work is exegetical and remains tied to Paul's letter, informed by a conviction that "rhetoric" of any sort would interfere with the freedom of God's word to flow as it pleases. Only in Bultmann's notion of demythologization (fully articulated in 1940) do we find the question of the Bible's truth asked straightforwardly and answered directly. Speaking of the mythological character of the New Testament, Bultmann wrote, "Contemporary Christian proclamation . . . has to face the question whether the New Testament proclamation has a truth that is independent of the mythical world picture, in which case it would be the task of theology to demythologize Christian proclamation."[67]

Rosenzweig's vehement protestations against what the Bible is not never led him to establish a positive definition of the "truth" of the Bible. "What matters in translation is only and exclusively 'exactness'; we need not concern ourselves with the 'artistic,'" he wrote.[68] The

[67] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

[68] See Rosenzweig's footnote, Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 144; Franz Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 61.

stakes of religious claims in a post-historicist, increasingly cosmopolitan era are clear. The "truth" of religion had to be asserted in the face of challenges from the past and the present – even if the nature of this truth was not yet clear. Yet alongside this vague concept of the Bible as "true" remained a more defensible characterization of the uniqueness of the Bible. The Bible's uniqueness could not be objectively granted, neither by dint of authorship nor by virtue of its literary qualities or even truth-value, but it could be asserted on the basis of its role as the central axiom of several religious traditions. Only in one passage – one of the most lucid, and the most honest passages in Rosenzweig's entire corpus – does he admit this position explicitly:

> I believe that almost every element of the Bible can be shown to exist elsewhere as well, if one has sufficiently wide knowledge – knowledge that is of course harder to acquire than is the abstract thesis of universal comparability. The Bible's uniqueness is to be demonstrated irrefutably with respect not to the book as written but to the book as read. The Bible is not the most beautiful book in the world, not the deepest, the truest, the wisest, the most absorbing, not any of the ordinary superlatives – or at least we cannot impose any of these superlatives upon anyone not already predisposed in their favor. But the Bible is the most important book . . . What is at issue is not a question of personal taste or spiritual disposition or intellectual orientation, but a question of transpired history.[69]

Here, at last, is the admission that shows Rosenzweig retracing the path from ontological to epistemological claims that German religious thinkers since Kant have traversed: he unambiguously relocates the significance of the Bible from its objective qualities or claims to its history and the readers that give it meaning. In admitting that its exceptionality lies in how it has been read, Rosenzweig concedes that the Bible cannot claim the ontological singularity its faithful readers attributed to it.

Rosenzweig's move here, which places communities of readers as the arbiters of religious experience and values, parallels the rise of the social sciences in the early twentieth century, as psychology and sociology began to gain ground as explanatory methods in the human sciences. Theologians such Ernst Troeltsch saw that historical claims could not

[69] Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis," 257–58; Rosenzweig, "Formal Secret," 140.

sustain religious revelation, and turned to the new social sciences to ground religious life. Similarly, Rosenzweig here argues – or perhaps admits – that the community determines the significance of a book.[70] His valiant efforts to transform the experience of Judaism by strengthening the vitality of its community thus naturally focused on revitalizing the text that had occupied Jewish readers for centuries.

Rosenzweig's responses to the challenges of his era – intellectual challenges posed not only to Jewish religious thinkers but to the dominant Protestant majority, and social challenges posed to those wishing to cultivate Jewish religious identity – remain rooted in and testaments to their time. But they also reach far beyond the concerns of Weimar Jewish life. In spite of the gaps and blind spots in Rosenzweig's unsystematic proposal for a *jüdische Bibelwissenschaft*, he nonetheless reached toward the formulation of a concept of scripture fully able to respond to the most pressing challenges of our times.

[70] Compare this stance with that articulated in Ernst Troeltsch, "The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith (1911)," in *Writings on Theology and Religion*, eds. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (Atlanta: Knox Press, 1977).

Conclusion: Scripture Today – Some Considerations

This study emerged out of a desire to understand whether, and with what qualifications, "scripture" might have meaning for contemporary readers. I was drawn less to questions of specific corpora and more to the problem of how various intellectual and philosophical aspects of the modern period impinge upon and problematize pre-modern concepts of scripture and its uniquely authoritative status. Undertaking this inquiry required acknowledging the possibility that modern historical and scientific thinking, and the increasingly global perception of the world, have rendered "scripture" an antiquated and irrelevant construct for contemporary religious life. On the other hand, it also required considering the continuities between pre-modern notions of scripture and post-Enlightenment transformations of those assumptions. Finally, the task necessitated considering how the answers adopt different hues when one considers Jewish, rather than Christian, claims about scripture; general claims about the content and role and nature of scripture often mask partisan or parochial assumptions that break down when examined closely.

Franz Rosenzweig, as I have argued in this book, provides an especially inviting focus for pursuing these questions. His work reveals a rich and ongoing experimentation with investigating how scripture might have a role in the religious life of the modern individual and community. Rosenzweig's engagement with the question of scripture drew upon his deep knowledge of the Western post-Enlightenment philosophical tradition, his personal and intellectual interest in the vibrant world of Weimar theology, and his dialogues with friends and colleagues who were equally engaged in understanding the place and

meaning of religion in the rapidly secularizing and modernizing world. Rosenzweig brought to his work something else as well: a keen sensitivity to the political implications of entering this conversation as a Jew, a sensitivity that eventually led him to reject the possibility of a disinterested, "neutral" approach to scripture. These components of Rosenzweig's thinking suggest that his work provides a fruitful basis for addressing a set of challenges for the contemporary understanding of scripture.

And indeed, Rosenzweig's corpus – particularly his attempt to reinvigorate scripture in a post-critical context – demonstrates how complex the effects of secularization and the reactions against it have been on religious thought. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, a consensus was widely shared among scholars of religion and society that the hold of religion had diminished since the medieval period, in direct response to the host of social and cognitive aspects of modernization. Since the 1970s, challenges to the secularization thesis have multiplied as scholars have attacked "secularization" as a vague and ideologically driven concept that cannot account for the many manifestations of increased "religiosity" in modern society. Neither of these dominant and opposite positions, however, has seriously grappled with the phenomenon of liberal religious thought, by which I refer to religious thought conditioned by the social and intellectual constraints of the Enlightenment and the responses to it.

This type of religious thought adds a different dimension to this debate, for it neither validates the secularization thesis nor vindicates the view that the sway of religion has increased in the modern period. Rosenzweig's work offers a compelling case study in this regard. Rosenzweig, a thinker fully adapted to the intellectual conditions of late modernity, simultaneously invoked forceful and unapologetic concepts of revelation and scriptural authority *and* admitted their insufficiency. The earlier works I have examined, particularly "Atheistic Theology" and *The Star of Redemption*, exhibit his boldest reject of the constraints of post-Enlightenment thought. Thereafter, he gradually began to tacitly acknowledge the validity of these constraints in his work. I have argued that this movement suggests a reckoning with the limitations that the primacy of reason and autonomy held for even the potentially most rebellious modern thinker. Going further, I contend that the fervent

desire to throw off post-Kantian strictures on traditional concepts of revelation could not overcome Rosenzweig's own internalization of the critique of heteronomy and of the ontological privileging of the Bible that was so central to modernity itself.

The struggle to create a religiously and intellectual compelling model of revelation and its location in scripture nonetheless persists throughout Rosenzweig's works, informing the later essays as well as his earlier writings. His early work on religion was characterized by a radical theological absolutism: both his flirtation with conversion to Christianity and his renewed commitment to Jewish life emerged from this early commitment to a fundamentally religious orientation.[1] Rosenzweig's thought in this period revolves more around the juxtaposition of religion to irreligion (or liberal religion) than around the juxtaposition of Judaism to Christianity, a position clearly evident in "Atheistic Theology."[2] This perception is most visible in Rosenzweig's portrayal in *Star* of scripture as a "universal" language for describing the ontological reality of God in the world. This meant that scripture was marked neither by Jewish nor Christian features; instead it was presented as evidence of God's revelation, to which the two communities of faith testified.

Rosenzweig's depiction of the absolute, unmediated quality of scripture came at a price. In the attempt to credit the words of the Hebrew Bible as a primary, inescapable force in human ontology and in the drama of creation, revelation, and redemption, Rosenzweig avoided an honest reckoning with the modern critique of biblical authority. The unassailable force of Genesis, Song of Songs, and Psalms in *Star* was grand conceit, and the performative success of these texts required deferral or neglect of the questions that necessarily hound any constructive appropriation of the Bible as a scriptural text today. Rosenzweig wished to capitalize on the resonance and evocative power of the

[1] On Rosenzweig's early involvement with the radical theology of the Patmos circle, see Chapter 4 in Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[2] Franz Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, eds. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). See also Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig, *Judaism Despite Christianity: The Letters on Christianity and Judaism Between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969).

biblical words, but this project necessarily evaded the difficult task of articulating the limited possibilities that readers might find in scripture in the modern era.

Rosenzweig articulated these lurking questions and problems in his next projects. In the years following *Star*, he moved toward a more reflective stance on the ways in which the Hebrew Bible might become enlivened and "scriptural." The words of the Bible and their status for the contemporary reader became an object of explicit reflection, a question to be asked rather than ammunition in a campaign to compel recognition of the power of revelation. Rosenzweig began to identify a conflict between modern thought and the biblical world. This softening of his earlier theological stance suggests that he began to appreciate the limitations of his previous strategy for confronting and grappling with the most serious challenges to religious thought in his age. This shift in his approach to dealing with scripture was not primarily tactical, however, but reflective of his increased commitment to the fostering of Jewish religious life.

Perhaps corresponding to Rosenzweig's growing involvement in Jewish educational endeavors, an increasingly political tone colored his writings on the Bible. Rosenzweig increasingly began to characterize scripture as being differently available to Jews and Protestants. He presented his translational work as the means to reclaim the Hebrew Bible, a text that was originally "Jewish," for both contemporary Jews and for general society. This in itself represents a striking contrast to *Star*, in which religious *communities* are clearly delineated (Jewish/Christian/pagan) but scripture is cast as universal. After *Star*, Rosenzweig began to use scripture as a vehicle for addressing Jewish marginalization in Germany and its redress.

The volume on Yehudah Halevi's poetry marks the beginning of the movement in this more explicitly political direction. It was with this project – all but ignored in most scholarly accounts of Rosenzweig – that he began to explore the possibilities for scripture to create a new, self-consciously Jewish linguistic territory in German. Breaking away from sources more recognizable to a wide audience, Rosenzweig used Halevi's work as the platform for his new agenda. Most crucial to this project was Rosenzweig's claim that Jewish consciousness was fundamentally diasporic. He began to regard the boundaries of the Jewish

people as created neither by biological membership nor confessional creed, but by the Hebrew Bible and the Jews' historic relationship to it, a relationship that antecedes any individual's encounter with it and that is rekindled through an existentially "Jewish" textual practice. This shift can be considered the first manifestation of a new and more radical political consciousness that Rosenzweig honed in the course of his later work on the Bible translation as well.

The Halevi book also became the site of new theological developments. With this volume, he left behind the formalism that had characterized *Star* and began to explore the individual's religious experience. In particular, this movement is evident in the more expansive conceptual framework for scripture that emerged out of Rosenzweig's encounter with the medieval poet. Halevi's transformation of the Hebrew Bible into the cadences and needs of his own poetic moment and personal yearnings seemed to inspire Rosenzweig to distance himself from the imposing, almost architectural prose of *Star*. Halevi's poetry became Rosenzweig's first model for the way a contemporary individual, no matter how temporally and removed from the events and reality of the biblical world, might find a language for a spiritual life in the words of the Hebrew Bible. Rosenzweig regarded Halevi's liturgical poetry in particular as offering a demonstration of this potential for animating the Hebrew Bible.

In his late essays on the Bible, Rosenzweig addressed the meaning of scripture for the contemporary reader in the most direct fashion in his entire corpus. He considered many potential explanations for the lasting power and the pull of the Bible in Western religious life and culture. None of them, it seems, was adequate when pressed. In conceding the depth of the challenge to biblical authority and revelation in the modern period, Rosenzweig demonstrated a serious engagement with the ways in which the modern intellectual situation precludes the simple reappropriation of the Bible as scripture. He endeavored again and again to identify specific biblical qualities as unique, authoritative, or revelatory. Yet he recognized that the ground of these claims was unsure, as philosophical and scholarly developments since the early Enlightenment had rendered any such unqualified claims impossible. The tension between arguments for the text's "meaning" and arguments for its "authority" found a partial resolution in his

embrace, in his last years, of what I have called a "sociological" perspective on the scriptural status of the Hebrew Bible. The religious community, in other words, was the locus of authority. It played the crucial role in determining its objects of veneration and thus in making the Bible into scripture. This perspective on the nature of religious authority demonstrates the distance Rosenzweig had traveled from his earlier apparent rejection of all compromises with the modern situation.

Rosenzweig remained fundamentally ambivalent about the degree to which he would make concessions to the reality of the liberal social and political world he inhabited and to the consequences of this thinking for theology. One might easily conclude from *Star* that he sought to subject ordinary philosophical thought to the greater wisdom of the Hebrew Bible. Little wonder, then, that Rosenzweig has been compared to George Lindbeck and other normatively post-critical thinkers.[3] In *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck presented a 'cultural-linguistic' approach to religious praxis and belief that culminated in a proposal for a religious community in which scripture would "absorb the world."[4] Rosenzweig does hint in a similar direction, writing of a scripturally formed world that would be the true world of which our ordinary one was a pale reflection. We see indications of this idea in Rosenzweig's commentary on a poem of Yehudah Halevi: "When a Jewish poet represents Christianity and Islam with Edom and Ishmael, he is not commenting on the present on the basis of scripture, but rather on scripture on the basis of the present."[5] The contemporary thinker, he implies, might do likewise, finding in the surrounding world the reflection of and the working out of a scriptural language.

[3] See especially Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Thought of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Peter Ochs, "An Introduction to Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation," in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

[4] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

[5] Franz Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften IV: Sprachdenken im Übersezten. 1. Band. Jehuda Halevi. Fünfundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte, Deutsch und Hebräisch*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 10; Barbara E. Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations, and Translators* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 177.

However, I believe it is more accurate to view Rosenzweig as a fundamentally liberal thinker who remained in fruitful and ambivalent tension with the modern critique of revelation and religion.[6] By "liberal" I have in mind neither the tradition of ethical monotheism that had developed over the course of the nineteenth century, which Rosenzweig found repellent, nor the liberalism of American political or American-Jewish political life, for and against which Rosenzweig's thought has been dubiously commandeered.[7] I mean, rather, the implicit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of an essentially Kantian framework for religion. The desire to overthrow or overcome this framework wrestled with his tacit acceptance of its lasting force for modern thought, and the struggle is evident from examining the way Rosenzweig believed scripture should be and could be read in the modern world. Particularly in his later work, Rosenzweig grew increasingly willing to grapple with the ways in which the modern consciousness brought about by science and history limited the types of religious thought that could be intellectually sustained. It is this later Rosenzweig, rather than the author of *Star*, who produced the richest record of the struggle to articulate a compelling concept of scripture for modern life. Seeing him in this light not only yields a new picture of the thinker as a whole; it also offers a site for working through the coherence of the assumptions and desires that informed our own navigation of the same difficult terrain.

WHAT MAKES THE BIBLE, OR ANY TEXT, SCRIPTURAL? ANCIENT readers would have been able to answer this question more readily than we. They knew sets of texts and oral traditions that, even before canonization, were ontologically privileged. To these readers, listeners, and retellers, these texts were unique in kind, and had been delivered to the

[6] Even in texts like "The Builders," Rosenzweig retained a basic emphasis on the right of will to trump any sort of compulsion toward the law that could be regarded as interfering with individual autonomy. See Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Bauleute," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984); Arnold M. Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 7.

[7] On the "Americanization" of Rosenzweig thanks to the influence of Glatzer's reading of him, see Eugene Sheppard, " 'I Am a Memory Come Alive': Nahum Glatzer and the Legacy of German-Jewish Thought in America," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 1 (2004); Peter Gordon, "Rosenzweig Redux: The Reception of German-Jewish Thought," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 17–18.

worship community in a unique way; they were cryptic and required special interpretive rules and procedures; and they were perfect in composition and in their instructive value.[8] Over the course of the centuries, these aspects of the Bible were integrated into the perception of the canonized text that became identified as *biblia* or *scriptura*. A host of interpretive traditions and social practices ensured the privileged place of the Bible in Jewish and Christian cultures.

These qualities associated with the biblical text itself and the practices that reinforced this understanding of the Bible can continue to serve us as guides for defining "scripture" only with substantial qualification. The Western world that has been shaped by modern methods of cognizing and modern social arrangements precludes the possibility of scripture in the sense in which that concept applied for ancient and medieval readers. The intellectual foundations of our consciousness have eliminated the ontological distinction that would characterize any single text as generically unique. This has, in turn, obviated the need for require special procedures of interpretation. The intellectual tools that have been applied to the Bible for two centuries have rendered it a book that is, in principle, a book like any other. Likewise, any literal understanding of divine transmission has been ruled out for most educated modern Westerners since the emergence, with Leibniz and Newton, of modern physics. Admittedly medieval commentators had – subtly and most cautiously – acknowledged textual defects not easily resolvable. But Spinoza's demolition of the perfection of the text was in large part so disruptive to medieval thought because it triumphantly publicized what had heretofore been relegated to esoteric allusion.[9] It was this very assault on the integrity of the Bible that inaugurated the modern critique of religion.

[8] For an elaboration of these basic elements of scripture for the ancient audience, see James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14; Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[9] Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) discusses the post-Mosaic authorship of certain Pentateuchal passages, the possibility that the prophets did not author the eponymous books of the Bible, and hints within previous exegetes' writings to this effect, in his *Perush Al Nevi'im Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Torah ve-da'at, 1954), 7–9. See also Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), Chapters 7 and 8.

Of all of the challenges leveled against the pre-modern idea of scripture, however, historicism – the advent of the modern historical method and the dramatic shift in consciousness that it created and to which it testifies – surpassed all of them in its dramatic implications for the place of the Bible. Modern historical thinking precluded the idea that any text was unique in kind or delivered to humanity in a never-to-be-repeated event in ordinary history. Not only the Bible but virtually every aspect of traditional Jewish and Christian faith has been decisively altered by the reign of historical thinking. As Van Harvey argued in his classic study of the ongoing significance of historicism for Protestant theology, the nature of what moderns have come to regard as appropriate evidence for claims about the past testifies to a revolution in our consciousness that mitigates against divine transmission and all other historical claims made on the basis of the Bible.[10] Harvey concluded from this that any Christian faith that based itself on historical claims was unsustainable, riddled with a level of confusion that would lead to its eventual breakdown.[11]

But *scripture* nonetheless remains a term with relevance, and even importance, for understanding the course of Western religion in the modern period. For religious thinkers have continued to find, in the concept of scripture, a valuable language for describing or reviving an animating force in religious and cultural life. Certainly no text will regain, in a post-Kantian era, the metaphysical qualities of the ancient or medieval Bibles. But even as religious thinkers have recognized that

[10] Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), xxxii, 68ff. and passim. Historicism has had no less of an effect, though perhaps less acknowledged, on Jewish thought. Rosenzweig himself made this insight the basis for his early attack on liberal Judaism in Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology." For recent scholarship on historicism in Jewish thought, see David Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1989).

[11] Harvey's introduction to the second edition suggests that he might have made this argument in different terms by tracing the Protestant origins of the modern historical method. A useful contribution to that project can be found in Thomas A. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

the ontological, ethical, and historical uniqueness of this text has slipped forever out of reach, they have nonetheless attempted to counter with the argument that the Bible provides for unique truths and paves the way for their discovery. The impossibility of any simple understanding of a divine intervention in human affairs with the delivery of a text likewise does not mean that the entire concept of divine transmission has simply been jettisoned. Rather, it has been transformed, and the moment of discovery of the truths to which the biblical text points has become internalized.[12] If scripture now can no longer indicate a specific body of literature or a *sui generis* literary text or oral tradition, it can stand for the special relationship evidenced by a group of people with a text or set of texts in their cultural and religious life in the broadest sense.

The course of biblical scholarship, theology, and comparative literature testifies to the persistence as well as the implausibility of pre-modern understandings of scripture's power. Critical biblical scholars have, with Walter Eichrodt, Gerhard von Rad, and others, attempted to identify the core of the biblical message. Literary scholars have argued for the unique cosmic vision of the Bible ever since Erich Auerbach's famous comparison of the binding of Isaac in Genesis to Odysseus's scar.[13] Theologians, Jewish and Protestant, have redefined the "historical" claims of the Bible's unique transmission so as not to contradict the ways of knowing history that are, now, second nature for us.[14] The struggle to redefine or reinvigorate claims for the Bible's uniqueness based on its compelling beauty, message, historical role or historical claims represents one of the possible pathways for scriptural thought in the modern era. The other route, of course, requires acceptance of the radically demoted status of the Bible and the impossibility of recovering "scripture," at least in any sense continuous with the pre-modern past.

[12] See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson (1793; New York: Harper, 1960); Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (1919; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

[13] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John Marks, rev. ed. (1949; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Mara Benjamin, "The Tacit Agenda of a Literary Approach to the Bible," *Prooftexts* 27, no. 2 (2007).

[14] Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

The effort to reassert the unique status and authority of a scriptural text and the rejection of any such endeavors represent the two opposite directions in which theology and biblical studies have gone in recent decades. These questions have the potential to be addressed with candor in the discussion of biblical theology, the very status of which remains contested, divided between those who regard the Bible as amenable to the identification of religious meaning and those who do not.[15] Does biblical theology belong to the realm of public discourse, and therefore require the abandonment of preconceived confessional or intellectual claims as to the special nature of the Bible? Or does it belong to specific traditions – especially the traditions of Christianity, whence comes the very concept of 'biblical theology'? If so, is the project of identifying, even merely in descriptive terms, "the" theology of the Hebrew Bible an irredeemably Christian endeavor?

In answer to this last question, we must acknowledge that the most prominent voices in the debate are, by and large, Christian. Few Jewish theologians have taken part in this conversation, even to reflect upon the absence of Jewish voices therein.[16] This is unfortunate. Jewish theological discourse could benefit tremendously from greater engagement with the central issues that have long been discussed among Protestant theologians in particular. And the latter could benefit from the expanded conversation that would result from wrestling with Jewish theological and hermeneutic discussions of the Bible and its relation to contemporary faith.

For Jewish theologians, there is much to learn from greater reflection upon and participation in the discussion of how historicism and the methods borne of it engender, and rule out, certain theological possibilities. Jewish theology, education, and communal vision in particular demand systematic thought about the significance of historicism for Jewish theological claims and for contemporary Jewish approaches to the

[15] John J. Collins, *Encounters with Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 3.

[16] Exceptions include M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Tanakh Theology: The Religion of the Old Testament and the Place of Jewish Biblical Theology," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. Patrick Miller Jr., Paul Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Jon Levenson, "Why Jews Are not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism, Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) and Benjamin Sommer, *Artifact or Scripture? The Jewish Bible between History and Theology* (forthcoming).

Bible. These matters have been frequently ignored by the very institutions that need the greatest clarity about them. There is much to be learned, here, from scholarship about Protestant theology in particular and from the debates – such as that between the "Yale" and the "Chicago" schools of theology, in the 1980s and 1990s – about how theology should respond to modern criticism. The perception by many Jewish thinkers and scholars that theology itself is a Protestant field or concept, justified or not, and that theology is not an "indigenous" mode of Jewish religious discourse, has no doubt contributed to the lack of widespread and direct engagement with the questions forced upon theological reflection by historicism and related issues. Jewish scholars and theologians, however, ignore these discussions to the detriment of Jewish theology generally and to the impoverishment of their textual tradition in particular.

There is some truth, of course, to the perception that theology, and biblical theology in particular, reflects a set of assumptions that may seem to be or actually are alien to traditional modes of Jewish theological reflection. The genres of literature that emerged in pre-modern times – aggadic and halakhic midrash, responsa, codes and commentaries, translations and glosses on the biblical text, and philosophy – do not include dogmatic theology as a dominant force. Genre matters: the scenarios conjured by the most audacious narrative midrashim cannot be reduced to dogmatic claims about God's presence or absence, transcendence or immanence. (And, of course, vice versa: systematic theologies have aesthetic as well as generic accomplishments that cannot be translated into narrative.)

But the lack of emphasis on theology as a specific kind of discourse does not mean that theological reflection is absent from Jewish classical sources; it exists, rather, in alternative forms. And with due respect to the importance of the manner in which these reflections appear, translation of these forms into contemporary theological discourse such that the role of the Hebrew Bible for historical and contemporary Jewish theology can be analyzed is a necessity. This is so both because of the position of Jews as a small minority within larger societies in an increasingly global world, and because Jews must be able to translate these ancient texts to themselves, a people already distant from them.[17]

[17] This recognition prompted Bultmann's argument for demythologization; see Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

In turn, the reshaping of biblical theology to reflect a serious engagement of Judaism would necessarily alter, perhaps dramatically, the discussion of "the Bible" and its theological dimensions. For Christian and Jewish theologians not only have different corpora in mind when speaking about the Bible, but they also participate in dramatically divergent hermeneutic traditions, each with its own authority in the eyes of later interpreters. Taking account of these divergences presents an opportunity for rethinking the assumptions that dominate the field. These elements, taken together, must all be understood in light of how the Enlightenment – and its own continuity, in somewhat secularized form, in Protestant theology – has reshaped traditional scriptural claims.

A Jewish contribution to biblical theology might, then, be "canonical," in Brevard Child's sense of the term, insofar as it would recognize the vital role of rabbinic hermeneutics as part of the normative reading history of the Jewish scriptures. Yet in order for it to be viable for modern readers, who cannot suspend their assent to a host of propositions about historical development, it would also be "critical" insofar as it would acknowledge the variety, multivocality, ambiguity, and rupture within the hermeneutic tradition. And such an endeavor would need to go further, I believe, by subjecting the biblical and post-biblical sources to the full range of moral as well as the historical and textual criticism that our integrity as thinkers and contemporary human beings demands.[18]

The issues that still animate theologians and theologically minded biblical scholars are extensions of the same problematics that this book has engaged. Judicious, thoughtful, and sober reflection upon both the sources of the ancient past *and* the critical apparatus we have inherited and that we continue to shape must play equal parts in creating a richer discourse about scripture as a possibility. Rosenzweig's work provides an incomplete but invaluable engagement with the historical, cultural, and philosophical considerations that must necessarily shape the contours of any contemporary discussion of scripture. His intellectual journey, at once directed and peripatetic, marks out crucial features of the terrain in which any examination of scripture's possibilities in modern religious life will take place.

[18] John J. Collins, "Was Something Lost? Review of James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*," *Commonweal* 134, no. 18 (2007); John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans., 2005).

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